

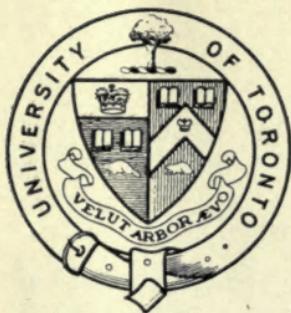


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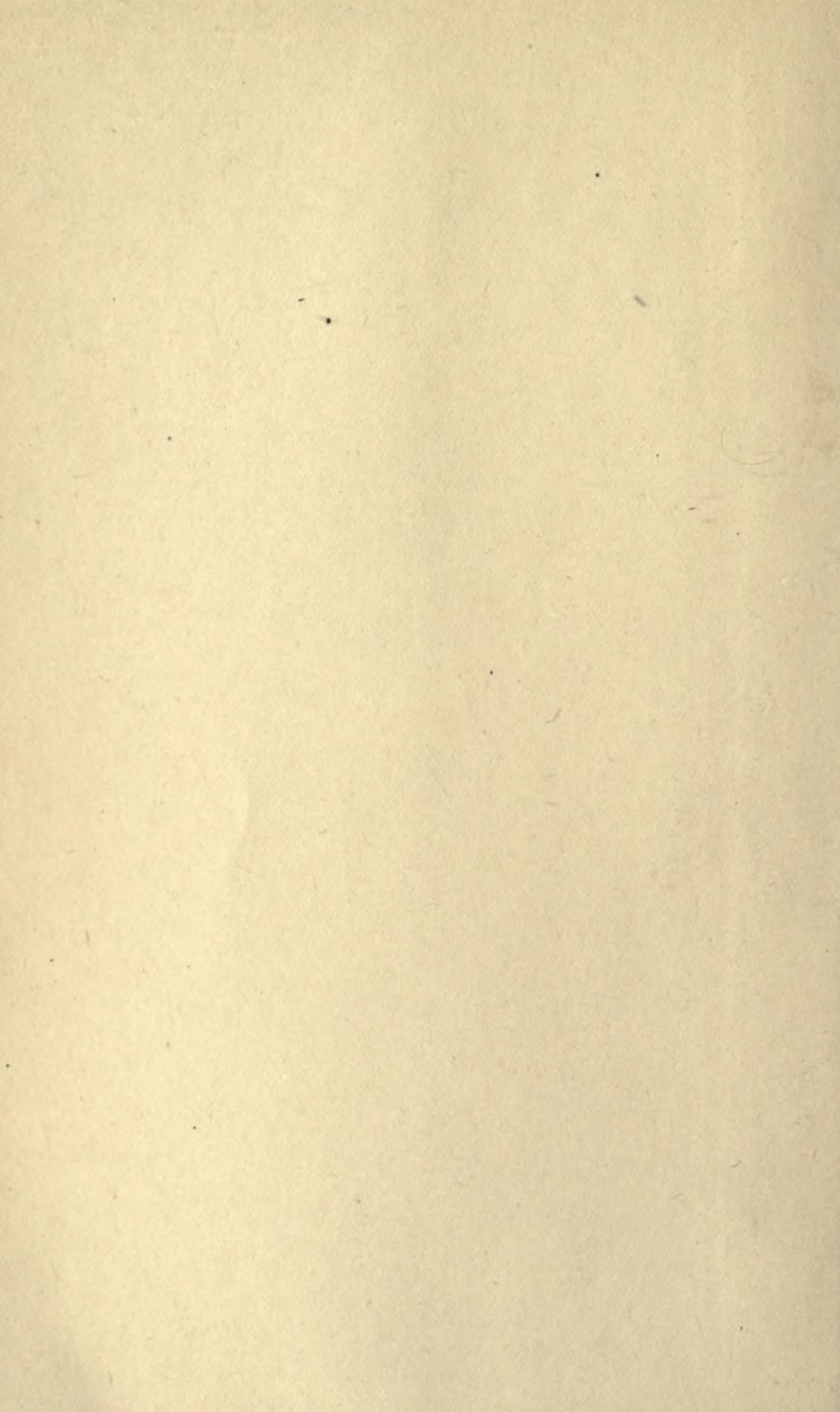
by

Marion Harland



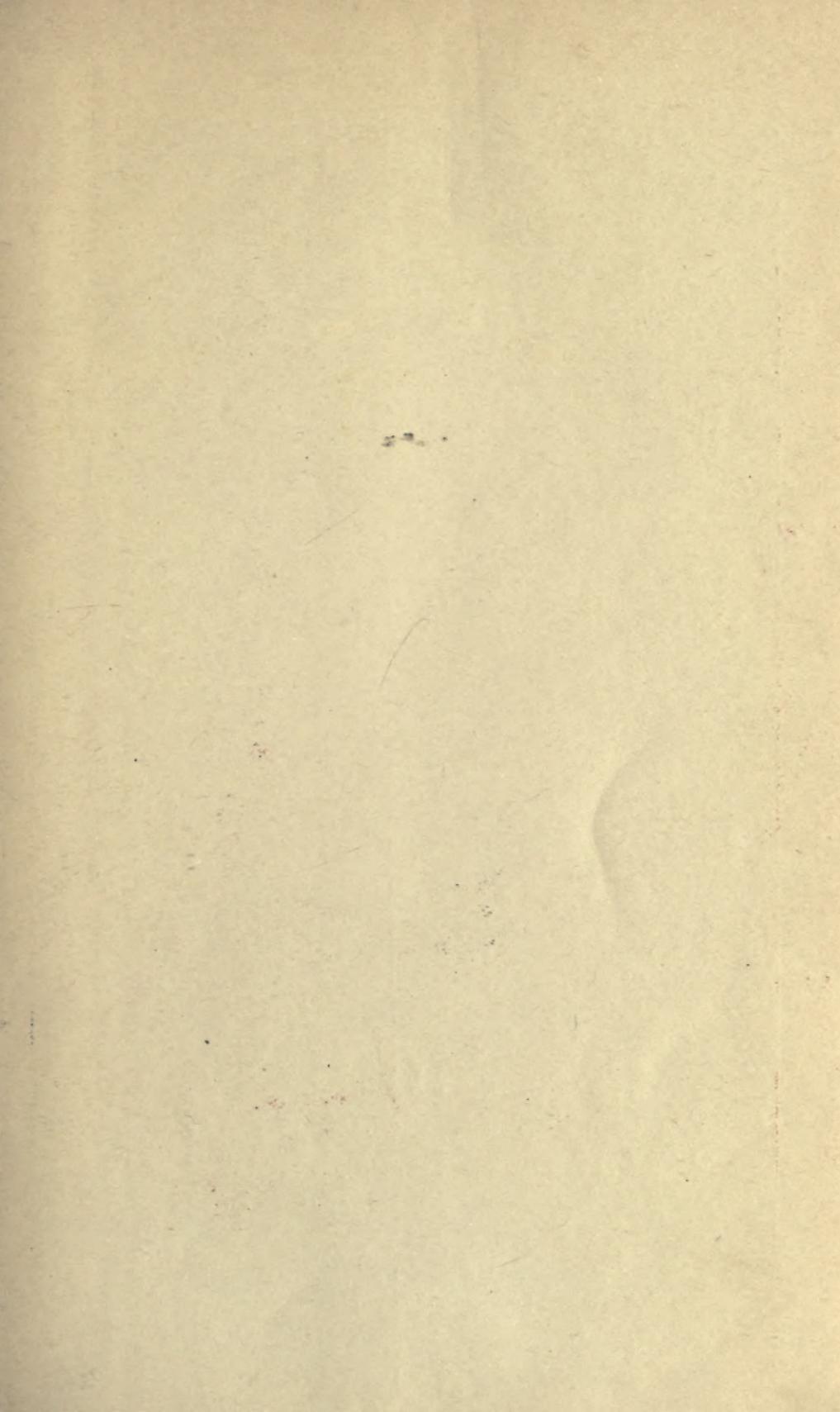
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A LONG LANE

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"It is Sarah Van Dyls. And if she is dead,
I killed her!"

A LONG LANE

BY
MARION HARLAND

AUTHOR OF
"Alone," "A Gallant Fight," etc.



Frontispiece

TORONTO
McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART, Inc.
1915

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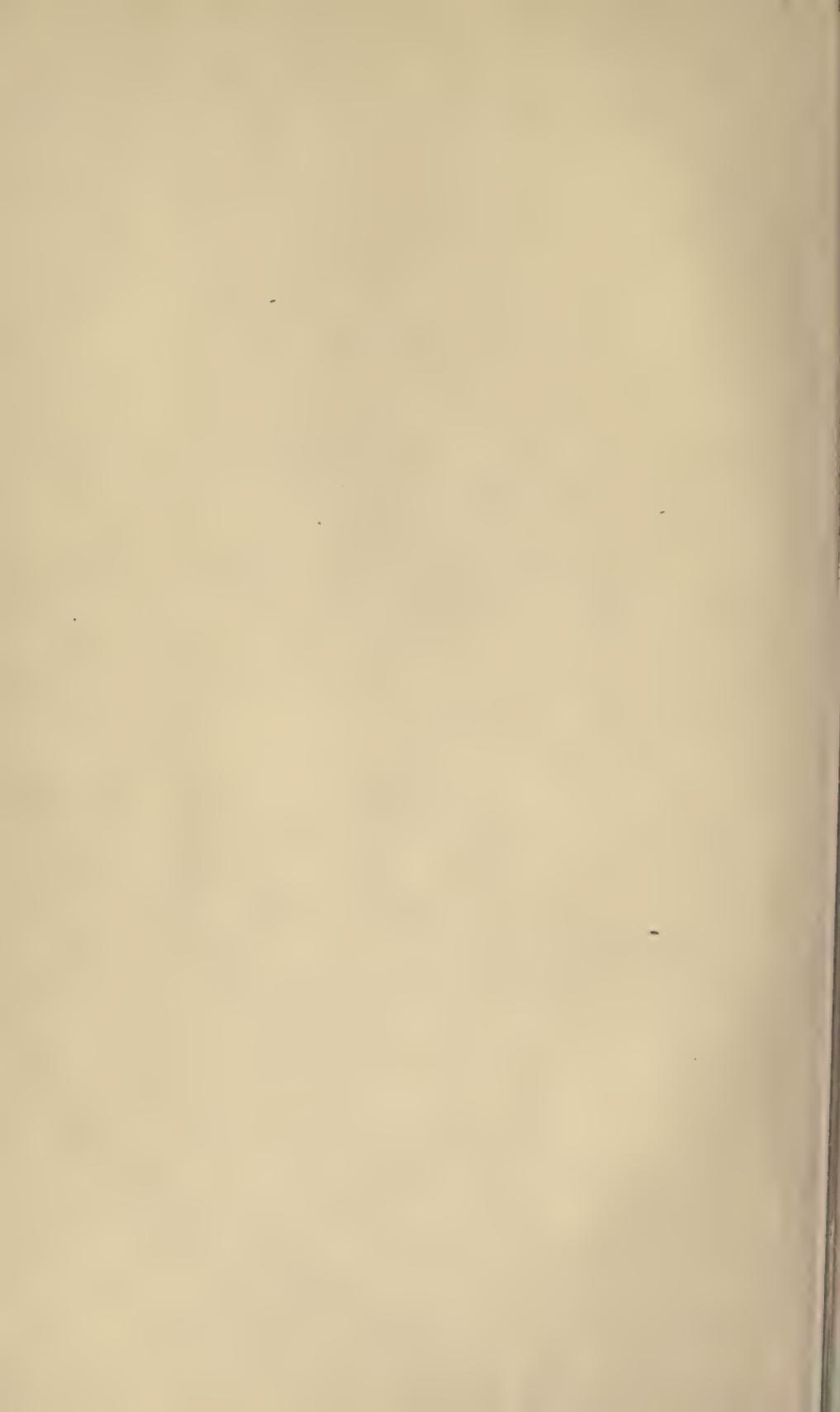
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To the Honored Memory of one of
God's Noblemen,
"The Dominie" of my Chronicle,
The work is affectionately dedicated



FOREWORD

More than a half-century ago I first made acquaintance with the persons and scenes that go to the making of this story. For forty years the wonder has been growing in my mind that a field so rich in historic interest, tradition and romance should have been left unworked by the novelist.

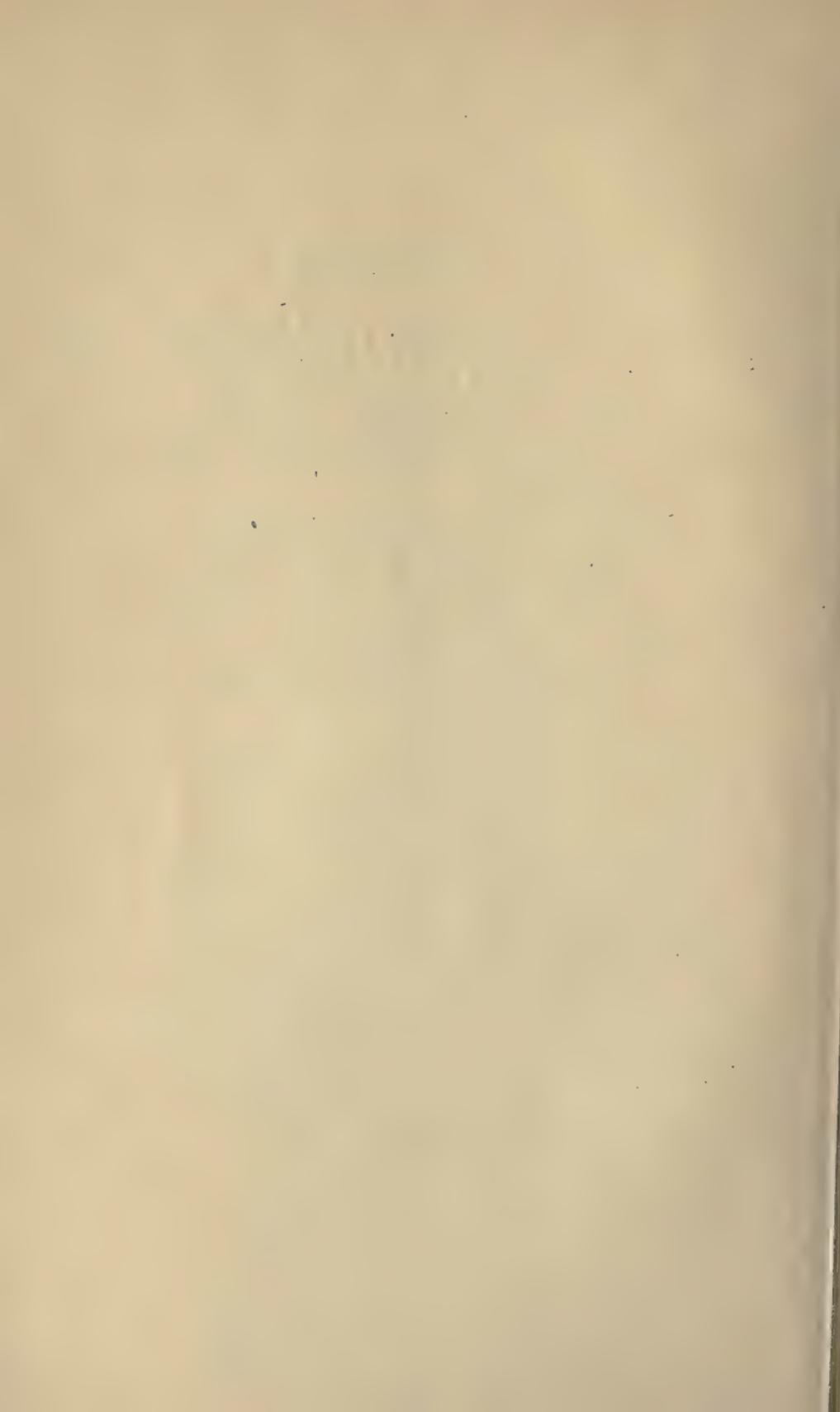
With the wonder grew the longing to share with readers of my own the wealth of material laid to my hand by intercourse with the native annalist, and research into chronicles of families now extinct, or of which the descendants of our generation have sought homes elsewhere than among the hills deeded to their ancestors by royal grant.

When the longing would no longer do, I began my recital. I use the word advisedly. So little of the narrative is the work of imagination, and so much is supplied by memory, that I can hardly claim the authorship.

The task has been to me one long delight. If I have fallen short of my cherished ambition to do for Northern New Jersey something of what Margaret Deland has done for Old Chester, and Mary Wilkins and Alice Brown have done for rural New England, I may indulge the hope that I have led the way for abler explorers and miners.

MARION HARLAND.

KANESATA, POMPTON, NEW JERSEY.



A LONG LANE

A LONG LANE

CHAPTER I

I TELL you, sir, the best blood in New York State and in New Jersey is pure Dutch! All this region was settled by emigrants from Holland who held land by the thousand-acre from royal grants. I can show you a line of crooked trees, mor'n two hundred year old, not a mile from here, running clean across the lake that was a river-bottom then, that were saplin's in Queen Anne's time, strapped together by surveyors. Enough are left to show where the line ran between ten thousand acres deeded to Jacobus Van Vranken and eight thousand deeded to Johannes Van Dyck—my great-great-grandfather. Further up the valley, the Van Corlaers (your ancestors, Will)—pointing with the stem of his pipe to a young man on the other side of the room—"owned as much as both of the others put together.

"The Dutch always located near water when they could. And this valley is certainly watered 'like the garden of the Lord.' The widenin' of the river made one of a half-a-dozen small ponds, all strung together by the river. The Indians counted them in as one. That's why they called the valley 'Kinapeg.' It means 'Long Pond' in the lingo of the tribe that the Holland settlers bought out—or chased out—when they came."

The speaker was John Van Dyck, Senior, farmer and

miller, elder in the Kinapeg Dutch Reformed Church, husband to the comely matron facing him from the opposite corner of the hearth, and father of the three strapping youths contributing each his quota to the blue haze rising lazily to the ceiling, and of the fair-haired girl knitting industriously near a window in the shadow of the young man whom her father had called "Will."

The worthy free-holder and patriarch was a well-kept man of sixty, of medium height and what he would have described as "stocky" in build.

Dante writes of one whom "Death had forgotten to strike." It was a saying in the Kinapeg neighbourhood that "trouble always shied off from John Van Dyck." He had inherited a goodly estate; married the first woman he courted; she had borne to him three healthy sons and one fair daughter. He had told his pastor, Dominie de Baun, once and again, that he had marked in the old Family Bible a text he wished might stand as his biography:

"The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in all that thou settest thy hand unto."

With a tongue that was never more glib than when religious "exercises" were the theme, he added: "Yet why should I wonder that these things are so? My forebears were of the salt of the earth. It would be a lack of faith to be afraid the salt would lose its savour in the third and fourth generation."

The person for whose delectation he was now haranguing was a man of perhaps four-and-twenty, whose unlikeness in type and demeanour to the four masculine Van Dycks present was marked. He was a university graduate, a native of Connecticut and a prospective college

professor, who had, a month before, been appointed to the position of principal of the Kinapeg Academy. A younger brother of Mr. de Baun had been Norman Lang's classmate at Yale, and the choice of a preceptor for the rejuvenated Academy was made at the clergyman's instance.

Already the pleasing manners of the new master had commended him to the neighbourhood, his good looks to matrons and spinsters, and he had made friends out of hand with the boys and girls enrolled in the school. Mrs. Van Dyck had consented, at the Dominie's suggestion, to receive him as a boarder for the first term, and he had fitted into his domestic niche with facility which betokened tact and good feeling.

The Van Dyck brothers—Cornelius, otherwise "Case"; Cortlandt, shortened in domestic parlance to "Cort"; and Jack—had rebelled at first against the intrusion upon the free-and-easy family circle of "a city fellow, chock-full of high-falutin' notions." But for the steadfast decision of the mother, the new master would have been sent to the right about at the first intimation of the Dominie's project. They would have denied to-night that they had ever opposed her, so heartily had they adopted him as crony and exemplar. It was yet curiously significant of their unconscious recognition of the social and intellectual distinctions separating them from the late-comer that, while he had dropped into the habit of addressing them by their Christian names, he was to them, then and always, "Mr. Lang."

The teacher had brought down a set of dominoes this evening, and while his attention to the patriarch's harangue did not flag from beginning to end, he only waited for the last word before he opened the box and spread the contents upon the centre-table, from which the

brothers had cleared books, papers, and tobacco-pouches to make way for the novelty.

"I am sorry," remarked Lang, looking over his shoulder at the young girl and her visitor, "that we have not room for more than four to-night. When the three pupils have mastered the game, I hope you, Miss Sarah, and you, Mr. Corlaer, will give me the pleasure of including you in our party?"

His winning smile brought an answering gleam to the faces of the pair, and a blush to the girl's.

"We'll see how they get along first," she said, with an evident attempt to overcome diffidence.

Her companion rejoined with forced lightness:

"We are very well satisfied where we are!"

It was an awkward speech. Sarah's head sank lower over the knitting in her hands, while the brothers grinned furtively, and Mrs. Van Dyck rattled the fire-irons in laying a log within the maw of the capacious "Franklin" that dispensed warmth and cheer throughout the room. Her husband hastened to fill the impending pause:

"You'll excuse me for sayin' it, Will, but I shall always be sorry your grandfather dropped the 'Van' from his name. It was a sign of noble blood in the old country. The Van Nostrands in Brooklyn and the Van Wagners in Newark have done the same thing. This is a free country, but to me it's a good deal like a man sellin' his birth-right."

"Father! Father! Come, now!" began the wife, seeing the hot blood darken the cheeks of the visitor.

Sarah's face broke into a saucy smile that stirred pretty dimples into sight.

"Why did you name your second child 'Cortlandt,' then, father? You left off the 'Van' there. Wasn't that giving away the birthright for him?"

Everybody laughed—even the father who would not have brooked the thrust from one of his sons.

“Maybe because two ‘Vans’ for one child would have been too much of a good thing, Miss Saucebox! Really, because the man for whom he was named dropped the title before it got to me.”

His ready-witted wife diverted the talk by turning her chair toward the couple on the outskirts of the circle about the fire, and falling into a reminiscent vein:

“I recollect hearin’ my mother say that when your grandfather brought his bride (your grandmother) home, the church-bells were rung just as they do in the old country when the nobility are married, and how the congregation stood up when the bridal couple came to church the next Sunday. Dominie Bogardus (he was pastor then) never used to begin service on Sunday until your grandfather and his wife were seated. I was nothin’ but a child when he—the Old Patroon, they called him—was buried. It was the first time the family vault had been opened since I was born. Sarah, child! You will take cold, sittin’ so far from the fire! Come up nearer, both of you! Our talkin’ won’t disturb them”—indicating the domino-players by a motion of the head. “If we do, Mr. Lang, you will please let us know?”

“You could not disturb us, my dear lady! And we will try not to learn so hard as to interfere with your conversation.”

In saying it, the teacher bowed slightly and gracefully to the young couple, rising from his chair as Corlaer moved forward with his companion, and noting what did not escape the mother’s eye, the livelier action and gratified expression of the youth.

Neither of the worthy couple attempted to disguise

from the other how more than satisfactory the impending match would be to them. The Corlaers were far and away the most influential, if not the wealthiest family in township and county. If the recipient of the royal grant of thousands of valley meadows and mountain woodlands were not officially the Patroon of the region, he bore the title by common consent, nor was the honour allowed to lapse into disuse until after the War of 1812. Then the father of the present proprietor of the demesne won the rank of Colonel in actual service. It was he who let the "Van" slip from the name, as the husk from a ripe nut.

By his orders, embodied in his last will and testament, a new slab was set in the family vault behind the old Colonial church in which he and his forebears had worshipped God according to the dictates of consciences indoctrinated by the Dordracene Confession:

"COLONEL JOHN CORLAER'S VAULT."

True, three generations of his blood and name were interred there before the door was unsealed to admit him. But he had enlarged what was, until then, a rude cellar, had it lined with cemented stone, seemly niches constructed in the sides, an arched roof of solid masonry built above it and an iron door swung in the opening that was previously boarded up. The countryside turned out *en masse* to witness the ceremonious induction of the latest tenant, and each burgher felt honest pride in the highly respectable addition to county residences.

The present head of the family was Wilhelmus Vroom Corlaer, and albeit he boasted no military or civic dignity, he was a man of mark. In his father's early manhood, the patrimonial acres were shorn of their breadth

in one direction by the sale to an English immigrant of a tract that included the river-bottom crossed by the primitive dividing line of interlaced saplings. The enterprising Lancashireman dammed the pretty vagrant river fed by mountain springs, and widened it into a lake. There was no more picturesque sheet of water in the valley embraced by an arm of the Appalachian chain. Woollen mills were erected below the fall of thirty feet, and a little village grew up about them. That the Corlaer coffers were not filled by the sacrifice of a section of their lordly estate was a fretting thorn in the side of the descendants of the ante-revolutionary progenitor. The fretting prick was a spur to native ambition and talent. Before the Lancashire vulgarian was born, another Englishman had explored the mountains lying further up the valley, and discovered iron ore of excellent quality. Wilhelmus Corlaer was still under forty years of age when he bought and reopened the disused and almost forgotten mine. Before he was fifty, tall chimneys punctuated the green heights of the mountains, rising, range above range, beyond the ring of huts surrounding the brick shafts. The magician who had forced the depths to yield their hid treasure was now sixty-five, hale as at thirty, and heaping up riches with full knowledge (he believed) as to who should gather them. Beside the only son, there were two daughters, now in the flush of early womanhood.

It goes without saying to one who has had the patience to read the rapid sketch of the Corlaer fortunes that the prospective heir to the bulk of the accumulated wealth and an ancient and honourable name was, *par eminence*, the "catch" of northern New Jersey. As naturally, it follows that his marked preference for the society of Sarah Van Dyck presaged to the maternal vision

the fulfilment of her dearest dreams for her youngest child.

Up to the November evening that dates the beginning of my story, the young man's attentions had been confined to calls at the farmstead of varying length, and at irregular intervals. It was only since the cold weather made doubtful the chance of seeing Sarah in the flower-garden or sitting upon the "stoop," work or book in hand, that he had cast aside subterfuges and called openly in the evening. The home-circle widened, easily and hospitably, to let him in.

The piano was wheeled into the sitting-room from the front parlor across the central hall, upon the pretext that Sarah really intended to keep up her music this winter instead of neglecting it for weeks at a time, as had been her reprehensible habit during the two winters that had elapsed since she left boarding-school.

She played passably well; Mr. Lang, with spirit and expression that incited her to diligent practice. All the boys and girls of that date attended singing-school at some time. There was talk of a special class to be held in the Academy under the leadership of the master for the practice of a Christmas oratorio.

The innovation upon time-worn neighbourhood and churchly customs was presently the theme of the talk with the quartette about the fire. The domino-players had, at Mr. Lang's motion, pushed the table further back and out of hearing of the quiet chat, and the rattle of the ivory chips made it more inaudible.

"He is wakin' us old fogies up," the farmer led off, a backward motion of his head designating the object of the remark. "It was only to-day that Mr. Corlaer was sayin' how lucky we are to get such a scholar and such a gentleman in this out-of-the-way corner. I, for one,

am glad to have somethin' goin' on winter evenin's that will give my boys *raytional* amusement. We wanted a dash of new blood.

"It's contrary to nature for young folks to be content to hug the chimney-corner, night after night, with never a bit of excitement."

"What about coasting, and sleighing and skating?" interjected Will Corlaer, frowning slightly at the disparagement of his home-environment.

Sarah followed him with—

"And candy-pulls, and quilting bees, and strawrides? I think the winter is the liveliest time of the year. You men are too busy in summer to think of entertaining us."

The shrewd mother detected the gleam in the eyes of the as-yet undeclared suitor. Decidedly matters were moving as she and a wise and benevolent Providence would have them.

The dual motive-power had a sudden jar:

The door of the sitting-room was pushed back with force that banged it against the wall, and there strode into the middle of the room a very tall, gaunt woman arrayed in a purple calico, scant in the skirt and baggy in the waist. Her abundant grey hair was bound about her head into a tight knot at the back, and she carried a lighted candle in her hand.

Mr. Lang and Will Corlaer arose at her entrance with the instinct of confirmed breeding. The rest of the men remained seated and looked expectant, but in no-wise startled.

The apparition stalked directly up to Sarah.

"Snow!" she croaked in a voice that belonged to neither sex. In uttering it, she gesticulated violently toward the nearest window, and, like a hoarse accompaniment, all now heard, as for the first time that evening, the fierce

howl of the north wind. "Rain! Wind!" her voice rising with the roar without. "*He*," thrusting her candle almost under young Corlaer's nose, "not go home! *Cold!* Put him to bed! Come!"

It was impossible to receive the proposition gravely, but the Van Dyck boys hid their mouths behind their hands and Sarah turned a blushing face aside. Will Corlaer rose to the occasion with address one would not have looked for in one so diffident and slow of speech.

"No, thank you, Miss Sauchy!" He spoke distinctly and slowly as to a deaf person, or a child. "You are very kind, but I must go home before the snow gets too deep. I did not know it was storming. Good-night, all!"

He shook hands with the rest of the company, meeting the hospitable protests of his hosts with a smile and word of acknowledgment. To Sarah's distressed murmur of apology, he returned a hurried, "Never mind! I understand!" and was gone.

The grey-haired woman rushed to the window and cupped one hand over her eyes to peer into the darkness.

"*Good boy!*" The ejaculation was so vehement it sent a spatter of candle-grease down the front of the purple calico. Then she coughed. "Cold! Snow! Bad! Bad!"

"He can take care of himself. Don't fret! He isn't a baby, Auntie!"

Still blushing behind her pretty ears, Sarah gathered up her work and led Will's distressed partisan from the room.

CHAPTER II

THE snow degenerated into rain before morning.

When Wilhelmus Corlaer's covered buggy was brought to the door after breakfast, the wheels crunched harshly into coarse, sleety mud; the horses shivered under rubber sheets bound closely to their sleek coats. The master drove and owned none but animals of high degree.

He appeared within the porch as the team stopped at the gate. His stalwart figure was encased in a shaggy dreadnought; a fur cap was strapped over his ears; the whip in his hand showed his intention to be his own coachman. His destination was the shiretown of Millville, a manufacturing centre ten miles away.

Mrs. Corlaer had ventured a gentle remonstrance at breakfast.

"Is it really necessary for you to go to-day, my dear? It may be better weather to-morrow," pleaded the sweet voice in cadences that were never more persuasive than in addressing the consort of forty years.

She had heard the formula of the reply often enough to forewarn her:

"Did you ever know me to break an engagement on account of the weather? There should be hot milk for coffee in weather like this!"

"Here it is, dear! It was my mistake in passing you the cream-jug," she hastened to respond. "It was very careless of me."

There was no recognition of the apology and little

talk of any kind during the progress of the meal. Always well-cooked and abundant, it was especially attractive this morning. Broiled chicken, garnished with sausages; fried potatoes, hot rolls, waffles and honey—were the staples of a repast that would horrify the dietetist of the Twentieth Century. It might have been said of Wilhelmus Corlaer, as the epitaph upon the tomb in the Westover garden records of Colonel William Byrd, —that he was “a splendid economist.” His methods did not stoop to the sordid details of what was eaten and drunk in his household. His whole life was constructed upon large lines and broad spaces. The business that called for a ten-mile drive in the teeth of an easterly storm involved thousands of dollars. He would have kept the appointment as punctiliously had it been a matter of cents.

To be masterful was the prerogative of the head of a household at that day. The rod was the scriptural symbol of paternal authority, and “Wives! Submit yourselves unto your husbands!” aligned itself with the decalogue. What rule was gained by the weaker vessel was achieved by diplomacy, by tears, or by scoldings. The true gentlewoman who had called Wilhelmus Corlaer “Lord” for two-score years, could not lower herself to the plane of a schemer, or termagant. Their offspring took “Father’s ways” as an integral factor of the daily life of young people whose parents still lived and reigned.

He uttered but one speech apart from such details of the business of the table as could not be slurred over, after the curt rejoinder to his wife’s timid demur. Pushing back his chair with the definitive air common to the man-of-affairs, he rolled up his napkin, rammed it into the silver ring, and accosted his son:

"You will write all those letters this forenoon and see that they go to the post-office. Say to Brinkerhoff & Company that I shall put their account into a collector's hands unless payment is made at once. Good-morning!"

A comprehensive movement of head and hand applied the salutation to all at table.

The girls said carelessly, "Good-bye, father!" the son, "Good-day, sir! Sorry you haven't better weather!" and helped himself to a last waffle. The wife went with the traveller to the hall. The east wind brought in a rush of wet snow as the door was opened.

He held the lock fast while he dropped a hasty kiss upon her cheek.

"Go back! there is no sense in *your* catching cold!"

She stepped to the window to see him plough through the slush to the carriage, swing himself to his seat, tuck the rugs tightly about him and take up the reins. The hostler jumped away from the muffled heads of the horses and they bounded into the highway, scattering mud and spray on all sides.

The wife stood for a long moment, straining her eyes through the drifting mists. The straight turn-pike was lost in the wavering sheet fifty yards from the home-stead. The wind, setting in strongly from that direction, would, on most days, bring to her ears the steady roar of swollen waters tumbling over the dam. All other sounds were lost now in the persistent bellow of the increasing gale.

Her children were lingering over their breakfast, their tongues the more lawless for the restraint laid upon them during the major part of the meal.

"My dear mother! You look half-frozen!" from Margarita, the elder of the girls.

"Before *I* would go to the door with any husband alive!" This from eighteen-year-old Carrie.

Will drew his mother into a chair set close to the fire, and chafed her hands.

"Really, mother! it doesn't pay to risk a chill upon the chance of making a man feel a bit warmer about the heart on the coldest day of the season!"

"Especially when he doesn't care a rappee to have you do it!" chimed in his sisters.

"That shows how little young people know of such matters," smiled the mother.

Feeling that her boy stood close behind her, she let her head rest against his arm. While it lay there, she could have counted the throbs of the loving heart. Loyal to the last beat of her own to the husband of her youth, she thanked God inwardly that her boy and girls were, as yet, demonstrative of the love they bore her. With the thanksgiving was linked a prayer that she might not live until the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches had done their fell work upon generous and affectionate natures.

The tempest held its own as the day wore toward noon. Mrs. Corlaer, sitting with her sewing before her chamber-fire, saw, through a westward window, writhing boughs and the dim outlines of fences tracking across the pallid earth. Now and then, a fiercer gust lifted the crêpe-like curtain and she had a glimpse of the church-spires on the other side of what was, in summer, a pretty creek bordered with dwarf willows. It twisted leisurely through meadows separating the Corlaer grounds from the boundaries of the "Brouwer Place." Of which ambitious "residence," as the owner thought and spoke of it, we shall hear more anon.

Mrs. Corlaer's eyes and musings were with the Par-

sonage and inhabitants rather than with the spacious building on the other side of the road, when a tap at the door heralded her son's entrance.

At sight of his face, she hailed him cheerily:

"You look as if you had got those letters off your mind!"

"I have, thank Heaven! There were one dozen, all told, and none of them was short, except the warning to the Brinkerhoffs. I toned it down a little, of course. He may learn some day that business methods in the nineteenth century are more gentlemanly than they were in his youth.

"Don't flare up in his defence, mother! I didn't come to discuss my father's little peculiarities. Having finished the letters and balanced the books, and hearing the girls trying to out scream the wind in practising their duets in the parlour, I invited myself to sit with you until dinner-time—or as long as you can endure my society."

"Endure!"

Look and intonation said more for the one word than impassioned protestation could have conveyed. The wise and tender shepherd of the flock folded within the encircling hills knew her better than any other living human being, husband and children not excepted. With him "the cure of souls" was no idle form of words.

Years agone, he had learned that which made him crown this woman, in reverent thought, "the Queen of the Valley." To the wife who shared his admiration and respect for Wilhelmus Corlaer's wife, he thus named her. Not even to the true helpmate could he describe the gesture and look with which she had spoken to him one day of her boy as "the son of my soul!" The Dominie never told of the scene. He never forgot it.

The valley-gossips said openly that she spoiled her first-born child and only son. The father betrayed his appreciation of her partiality for the boy by never relaxing the discipline he held to be the only regimen for those of whom strict account was to be rendered in the final balancing of accounts. He was outspoken in his chagrin at his son's failure to imbibe the business principles that had stamped "SUCCESS" in staring capitals to all who knew the elder Corlaer. He had sent the boy to college in obedience to family tradition and custom, and magnanimously forbore to express the full depth of his mortification that his son stood at the tail-end of his class through every term, and barely scraped through the "finals." If the parent did not hear it said in so many words, that Will owed his degree to the fact that his father was a Trustee of Rutgers College and a liberal contributor to the funds of the venerable Alma Mater, he surmised—and justly—that the assertion was made behind his back. He took the virtual Failure into "the business" and wrought mightily to weld him into something like the shape Wilhelmus Corlaer's partner and presumptive successor should wear.

It would be a waste of words to write that none of these adverse circumstances moved the mother from her settled belief that her boy was undervalued by the community and dealt unjustly with by the father. She held fast to her faith in him.

To do Will Corlaer justice, it must be said that he was ever at his best when *en tête-à-tête* with his champion. His father would have stared incredulously had he looked in upon the pair to-day, secluded by the storm in the fire-lit cosiness of the mother's room, the son upon a cushion at her feet, his head against her knee, her hand playing lovingly in his hair.

"This is what I call home-comfort!" The remark ended a silence neither found awkward. The son stretched his long legs luxuriously over the carpet to bring his feet nearer the hearth. "Such comfort and in such a home is not to be found anywhere else in the Jerseys!"

"I am glad to hear you say it, dear. I am selfish enough to wish you to think your home the dearest place on earth. At least, until you have one of your own."

Motherlike, she heaved a little sigh in bringing it out. Lives there the woman who can cheerfully anticipate the abdication of the throne in her son's heart she has held in peace and pride from his infancy?

Will pulled her hand down to his lips. All that was best and noblest in him responded most fully to the wand of this eldest of loves.

Silence fell between them for a long minute. The wind keened shrilly around the gables; wraiths of snow wavered before the windows, hurrying to dash themselves to death against the western ramparts. The mother did not take up her sewing again until Will straightened himself into an upright posture and wrapped his arms about his knees, still staring into the fire.

"Mother," he began in an indifferent tone, "what is the matter with Miss Sauchy Van Dyck? Was she always as we see her now?"

She had not expected the talk to take this impersonal turn, but she answered as if it were perfectly natural.

"She was never quite right. As the Scotch say of such people, she is 'not all there.' She is Mr. Van Dyck's only sister. She can hardly be called idiotic. She is really shrewd about some things. She sews and weaves and knits beautifully; her butter and cheese are the finest in the county, and her preserves took a prize at

the State Fair some years ago. She has never learned to read, and, as you know, has a language of her own making. The family understand her. Her father and mother spoke Dutch. Indeed, many families in this part of the state did the same.

“Your father thinks that the mixture of Dutch and English spoken in the Van Dyck family was one cause of poor Sauchy’s jargon. In some way she has got hold of words that belong to other languages. One thing is very odd. She calls Mr. de Baun, ‘Dominie.’ That is natural. But she speaks of Mrs. de Baun as ‘Dominieisha,’ which Mr. de Baun says means the ‘Dominie’s wife,’ or ‘woman,’ in Hebrew. And she calls a man she does not know, or sees for the first time, ‘Ish’—the Hebrew for ‘Man.’ She used to speak of her mother as ‘Mère’ and her father as ‘Père,’ the French names for father and mother.”

She laughed softly before going on with the story, her needle playing in and out of the stocking she was darning.

“Mrs. Van Dyck tells to this day how angry Sauchy was with her sister-in-law when her third son was born. ‘What?’ she said, ‘one, two, three boys—plough—dig—cut wood! No girl—sew, churn and cook?’ If Mr. Van Dyck had not interfered she would have boxed the poor mother’s ears. She forgave her when Sarah came. From the first day of the girl’s life, the aunt has idolised her. Both were named for Mr. Van Dyck’s mother. ‘Sauch’ or ‘Sauchy’ is the pet-name for Sarah.”

Will raised himself to lean forward and put a stout billet of hickory wood upon the fire. He adjusted it carefully and stirred the scarlet embers to a hotter glow before saying—

“The old maid showed sense there! Her niece is

worth a thousand such fellows as her nephews. There's not a girl in the valley to be compared with her."

His back was to his mother, and he did not see the quick glance that went with the arrested motion of her fingers. Then she answered in a quiet, indifferent tone:

"She *is* a nice girl, a good daughter, and useful in her home and in the church. Do you know I believe it is snowing harder than ever? I am afraid your father will find the roads almost impassable."

Without withdrawing his eyes from the arrowy flames darting up the chimney, Will pursued the bent of his own musings audibly:

"She is good; she is pretty; she is bright; she has the sweetest disposition in the world, and I mean to marry her some day if she will have me!"

Mrs. Corlaer was never florid. Cheek and lips were bloodless now, and the dark eyes dilated with absolute terror. The hand that fell upon her son's head was cold and limp.

"Will?" she breathed hoarsely. "Do you mean what you are saying? I never thought of *this*!"

"I don't see why not!" His father could not have spoken more harshly. In the obstinate set of his features, they took on an odd resemblance to the autocrat. "It wasn't quite the thing for me to go around trumpeting it before I was sure that she would have me. Once that's settled, I'll be ready enough to let everybody know it."

There was a long, dead silence. The mother withdrew her hand from dalliance with the rumpled hair and folded it upon the other, as in prayer. If ever the saintly soul had need of divine help, it was now.

The boy sat motionless, his face darkening and stif-

fening into the likeness she would have recognized had she seen it.

The wind howled and the sleet thrashed the windows. Stray pellets found their way down the chimney throat and hissed spitefully at the coals.

Will broke the brooding silence:

“Of course I have known all along that you would all fight anybody I might want to bring into your blessed family! Maybe”—with no softening of tone, but with a queer catch in the throat—“I was fool enough to think that *you* might listen to reason.” He gulped again. “I see I was mistaken. I’ve got to fight it out single-handed, and by G—! I’ll do it, if the devil himself takes a hand in the battle along with the rest of you!”

“*Will!*” She had voice and reason now. If her husband had fighting-blood back of him, she came of Huguenot stock of heroic strain. “My son, you are talking like a hot-headed boy. You are twenty-four years old and, in one sense, you are your own master. In another, you are dependent upon your father. Before you think of asking a woman to marry you, you should consider whether, if you had not your present position, you could earn enough to warrant the step.”

She was speaking slowly and in language she would have used to a lad of fourteen.

“I need not tell you that your father would never give his consent to your marrying the daughter of John Van Dyck. Don’t interrupt me!” for he had stirred angrily. “You would better hear the truth from me than from him. The Van Dycks are excellent people in their way. The first of the family who emigrated to America were Dutch peasants. Their descendants have never risen above the level of what the English would call ‘plain farmer-folk.’ With the exception of Sarah, who spent

two years in a Millville boarding-school, not one of them has ever had anything better than a common-school education. The father and mother are respected in the community for sterling good sense and character. You know for yourself that he makes himself ridiculous at times by his pompous tone and self-conceit. His wife has more brains and makes less pretension to 'fine talk.' She is a kind neighbor, a good wife and mother, and a valuable church-worker. Every one who knows her esteems her. The sons are ordinary country boys who have no ambition above their station.

"Now, for the other side of the question: Your father comes of a race of educated gentlemen. You will find in the University of Leyden the names of several generations of his ancestors. He graduated from Rutgers College with distinction and is now a member of the Board of Trustees for the same. No man in the community or county—or, I may say, the State—is more respected. You are his only son. He has a right to expect you to marry in your own rank. Don't think me unfeeling, my boy!"

Dropping the judicial tone, she bent forward and put her arms around the unyielding form.

"My heart bleeds to be obliged to say all this! But you ought to know the truth! I would lay down my life to secure your happiness——!"

He shook himself free from the embrace and arose to his feet, shaking arms, legs, and trunk as a dog might make ready for a fight. His voice was thick and coarse.

"Talk is cheap!" growled the hope of a patrician house. "I've had my say, and you've had yours. I was a damned fool to think that I could make you listen to reason when your confounded family pride came into the matter. Now, hear the last word I have to say

until I get the girl's consent. I am going to marry Sarah Van Dyck if I have to go through hell to get her! I am going to have her at any price! I mean every word of it. I'll have her if it costs me my soul—and *hers!*"

He tramped the floor furiously, kicking chairs and footstools out of his path, the woman's anguished eyes following him, and down in the torn soul the rankling query—"Where are the tokens of the lineage to which I adjured him to be true?"

He pulled himself up abruptly, by and by.

"I suppose you will tell all this to *him* as soon as he gets back!"

She arose to face him. Flush and fire had returned to face and eye.

"I am *ashamed* of you for saying it! I shall not speak a word of what you have told me to any one until you give me leave. Your secret is safe!"

She stooped to gather up the contents of the work-bag that had fallen from her lap.

"You had better go to your room and get ready for dinner. It must be ready soon!"

He hung back sheepishly.

"I say"—gruffly, yet with a sorry attempt at conciliation. "You won't lay up anything I've said against me? I'd hate to be on bad terms with you. You see, when a fellow's in love——"

Her gesture and look stayed the rest upon his tongue.

"When a *gentleman* is in love—or under any other provocation—he does not swear at a woman! Least of all, when that woman is his mother!"

With that she walked away from him to the window and stood looking out into the tempest-torn world beyond.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTMAS was but two weeks off. The moon, peeping over the fringe of trees on the nearest heights, threw the long, black shadows of a train of sleighs sharply upon the stretch of white turnpike between the eastern bridge and the group of church-buildings—the Colonial church, the Academy and the hip-roofed parsonage. There were six long-bodied, low-hung vehicles, each drawn by a pair of stout roadsters, and filled from end to end with human figures.

“A straw-ride!” ejaculated the Dominie, aloud. “And the biggest of the season!”

He leaned over the wicket, as the leaders drew near. Rude box-bodies were fastened upon wood-sleds and half-filled with straw or hay. The revellers sat prone upon blankets covering the straw, three and four abreast. All were muffled up to the ears, and buffalo robes were tucked about each row. The driver of the foremost sled was the first to espy the familiar figure at the gate.

“Hurrah for the Dominie!” he yelled, swinging his whip wildly over his head.

Men waved caps and whips; women clapped their hands, and, above yells and the jingle of a dozen strings of bells rose chorused voices:

“For he’s a jolly good fellow,
He’s a jolly good fellow!
He’s a jolly good fel-l-l-o-o-ow!”

The person eulogised swung his hat in time to the tune with right hearty good will.

“A good time to you!” he shouted back as the last held-note abated.

In answer he got a ringing cheer, and by the time the procession was rising the hill beyond the western creek, the far-off crags were echoing a thundering chorus—

“We won’t go home ’till morning,
’Till morning doth appear.”

The Dominie laughed a heartsome peal.

“I’ll be bound they *won’t*—the young rascals!” he said to his wife, who, attracted by the noise, now appeared in the doorway behind him, with a shawl over her head. “They’ll make a night of it, if, as I suppose, they are bound for Ryerson’s!”

“Ryerson’s! Do you think they are really going all that way? Ten miles, and up-hill, every mile of it!”

“You forget, little woman, that they are young—and what you and I liked to do ten years ago. I wouldn’t mind it now! What a night! Jehoshaphat! I wish I had asked them to take us—you and me—along!”

“Ed de Baun! Are you losing your senses? And both of us catching our death of cold standing out here! Come in at once! Supper has been waiting this half-hour.”

The parsonage hall was wide, and, obeying the pull that coaxed him within, he shut the door and, seizing his wife about the waist, waltzed her to the other end and back again before she could free herself. Both were breathless, and he leaned against the front door to have his laugh out while she scolded:

“Ed! Suppose Rebecca Jane or Mary Kate had seen

you—a minister of the gospel! and in the hall of your manse!"

"David danced, my dear—and got scolded for it! Michal was afraid of what *her* Rebecca Jane and Mary Kate might think of her husband's antics. Surprising how history repeats itself!"

Rebecca Jane in person ended the feigned altercation, by presenting herself at the dining-room door.

"Supper's on the table, Mrs. de Baun. I s'posed you'd likely want to wait for the Dominie."

She was what would have been termed in the slaveholding South—a "likely" mulatto. She had entered the Parsonage service eight years before, bringing her four-year-old girl with her. The two constituted the domestic force of the home. The de Baun infants—a boy of four and a girl of two—had been asleep for an hour and more. The parents had the supper-table talk to themselves.

"I wish you had seen the mammoth straw-ride!" observed the husband, presently. "It is safe to allow an average of ten to each sled—with judicious packing. And *that* was pretty sure to be done—in this weather!"

His companion flushed rosily. She was city-bred and prone to be critical of certain rural customs.

"*I don't like it!*" she brought out, incisively. "I hope straw-rides will go out of fashion before *my* daughter is grown! The indiscriminate way in which young men and women are crowded together in the bottom of wagons or sleds is, to my way of thinking—hardly decent! And never a chaperon in the party!"

"Genus and *habitat* unknown!" interposed the fun-loving parson, transferring two more of Rebecca Jane's "griddles" to his plate.

"More's the pity! I had almost said, 'More's the

shame!' There's a deal of stuff talked and written of the simplicity and purity of country-life, and as much nonsense about the city being a hot-bed of vice. When, if the truth were told, we should find that much more care is taken by respectable mothers and fathers in town of the manners and morals of their young people than is ever dreamed-of in neighbourhoods like ours. It is but natural for young folks to like to associate on friendly terms with one another. When it comes to calling girls by their Christian names after ten minutes' acquaintance, and playing kissing-games, and sitting up until midnight, Saturday and Sunday nights, with a girl; when everybody else in the house is in bed—and driving a dozen miles after dark, the boys and girls all huddled promiscuously in the straw,—why, all I have to say is—I don't call it 'nice!'"

The Dominie roared. "'O lame and impotent conclusion!' My dear child! you should write articles for the *Christian Intelligencer* upon 'The Social Perils of New Jersey Country Life.' Really, my pet!" seeing the colour rise to her temples and the blue eyes grow misty—"You are setting up a man of straw for the purpose of having me knock him down. For generations past, the simple folk hereabouts have 'kept company' and 'sat up' on Saturday night, and gone sleighing and straw-riding, and lived moral Christian lives, died and gone to heaven as comfortably as if there had been a chaperon for every couple."

She was grave and dignified.

"I think you are forgetting some exceptions, my dear! Let me give you another cup of coffee!"

The subject dropped there by mutual and amiable consent, and was not referred to again during the meal.

A distant and incidental allusion was made to it in

his explanation of a call he intended making later in the evening.

"I ought to see Mr. Van Dyck before to-morrow evening's Consistory meeting," he observed, having enjoyed his usual after-supper pipe in the cosy sitting-room. "I am pretty sure to find him at leisure to-night. Cort was driving the foremost sled and I recognised the other two in the second and third. Probably Mr. Lang and Sarah were along, too. So I'll find the old couple alone."

He preferred walking the mile lying between the parsonage and the Van Dyck homestead to harnessing his own horse to the cutter in which he paid pastoral calls. The night was perfect. There might be six weeks' sleighing ahead of residents and wayfarers. Not a wheel had been seen on the highroad for ten days. For half a mile ahead but one house broke the white monotony of the silent world. That was a cottage set back twenty paces or so from the highway, and abutting upon the fence surrounding the church-yard.

He wished, in passing the gate of the cottage—now occupied by the widow of a physician who had "practised" in the township for a half century—that excellent Mrs. Stryker had not pitched her tent so close to the grave-yard where her husband slept, surrounded by scores of his ex-patients. Wished, too, that the relict had never told him that she "liked to think how much at home Doctor must feel with so many old friends about him!"

The pedestrian whirled his cane and began to whistle to drive away the irreverent fancy. He was half-ashamed to discover presently that he was whistling the chorus to which the hills had reverberated two hours ago:

"We won't go home 'till morning."

“Lucky Margaret didn’t hear me!” he chuckled. “The air to-night has gone to my head.”

The jovial crowd would be at Ryerson’s by now. The wayside hostelry, built by a father of the present Ryerson in 1818, had held for nearly a half-century a justly earned reputation for “good-living.” The Dominie had eaten countless dinners under the hospitable roof.

Less agreeable was the recollection of his Margaret’s expressed scruples relative to the proprieties she conceived were violated by straw-rides and cognate valley customs. He might have reminded the censor that he had asked her to marry him on a drive, “by the light of the moon,” from a farm-house to her city home. Perhaps it was as well that he refrained. Wives were a trifle sensitive sometimes touching early sentimental experiences.

He was whistling again. This time it was “Love’s Young Dream.” He strode down gently-rolling ground, the snow creaking under his feet, to a bridge spanning a little creek, and stopped to listen for the gurgle of the imprisoned water. In the clear radiance, he could see that it had burst through the crust, and was chuckling with glee.

“Must have vent somewhere and sometime!” moralized the spectator. “And it makes all the more fuss when it breaks bounds! There’s a lesson in *that*!”

Halfway up the hill beyond the creek, he spoke aloud, thumping the frozen crust with his stout stick. “Jehoshaphat!” his one and only oath, and in which he never indulged in the hearing of parishioners. “I wish I had thought of that in the argument with Margaret! I’ll bear it in mind the next time chaperons come on the carpet.”

The lights of the Van Dyck home were in full sight.

The mound chosen by the Van Dyck of the present generation as the site for his house commanded a view of the whole valley, with the intersecting streams and the farmsteads dotting the plains. At the foot of the hill stood the mill. Beyond it flowed yet another creek. A couple of hundred yards up the stream was the fall over the dam that supplied water-power to the mill, and broadened the creek above it into a lake.

The house was not yet ten years old. The Dominie recollected the low, rambling, stone cottage, built half-way up the incline. It was not demolished until the more pretentious residence over-topping it was completed. The terrace flanking the road was constructed of ancient stones from the foundation of the house that sheltered Johannes Van Dyck, immigrant, two hundred years ago. A winding path crept leisurely down the sloping yard about the house, from a porch facing the mill.

The Dominie's knock at the side-door was answered by the master of the house.

"Well! this *is* something worth seeing!" was his salutation. "Come in! Come in!"

The door at the right was wide open; the interior was red with lamp and firelight. At the dining-table in the middle of the room sat Mrs. Van Dyck and her sister-in-law, platters of citron and raisins, and saucers of ground spices in front of them.

"They give forth a goodly smell!" said the visitor when the first greetings were over. "Making ready for Christmas, I see! I heard my wife talking of mincemeat this morning. My mother used to say that it did not ripen under a fortnight. She kept it for weeks after Christmas—when we fellows had not eaten it all up. Go right on with your work, my dear lady! It is the next

best thing to eating the mincemeat to watch you preparing it. Mr. Van Dyck and I will superintend operations."

He was in an armchair now, opposite the workers, and entirely at home. Somehow, without hinting it in words, he had made his hosts feel that they were doing him a special favour by letting him call at that particular time, and that he could ask no better entertainment than to sit within their family circle on a winter evening, basking in the firelight, inhaling the "goodly smell," and watching the two women clip citron and seed raisins.

Parishioners would have told you that their Dominie "had a way with him that made friends for him everywhere." They never thought of analysing the charm. An octogenarian who had kept her vocabulary up-to-date, and who had a distinct childish recollection of the well-belovèd shepherd, told me once of this man that he was "so delightfully *human*." I may not be altogether ready to accept her definition of the natural gift—more precious than rubies to one of his profession—but I am constrained to offer it in partial explanation of the enigma.

He had gone clear around the table to shake hands with the other worker who had not lifted her eyes from the task until he stood beside her, with—

"Well, Miss Sauchy! I hope you are keeping well this freezing weather?"

She had yielded a stiff hand and grunted inarticulately, then gone on with her raisins, and never so much as glanced in his direction again. But when the others laughed at his merry talk, she tucked her chin into her neck and giggled under her breath.

The sound of the piano from the sitting-room across the hall, stole in upon the talk, by-and-by.

"Why! I supposed all your young folks had gone to the straw-ride!" ejaculated the guest. "I saw the boys in the forefront of the fray when it went by the parsonage. Cort was driving your team, Mr. Van. I needn't tell you there was not a better driver nor a finer team there. Didn't Sarah go?"

The mother bridled slightly, pursing her mouth in virtuous protest:

"No, Dominie! she *didn't!* I don't altogether hold with these late night-sleighin' frolics. Nor, for the matter of that, with the free-an'-easy ways some seem to think is all right."

She was snipping her words now in time with the scissors that shred the citron into bits. The visitor saw that she did not glance at her husband and that the latter smoked faster, seemingly absorbed in watching the blue curls chasing one another up the chimney-throat. It rushed at once into the shrewd mind of the onlooker that a conjugal argument, not dissimilar to that which had gone on over his own supper, had preceded the nocturnal frolic. He forbore to hurry the worthy dame's speech. He knew, of old, that it would have its own way, and with what effect. Her reputed lord might "talk large" in his consequential drawl, of masculine rights and attainments. She was the steam tug on the other side of the bigger craft, that regulated speed, and towed it into the haven whithersoever she willed.

"Mrs. Corlaer and me were talkin' of that very thing two or three days ago," the clipped accents resumed. "We're on the Supper Committee for the Christmas Entertainment, and have a good many chances of chat-*tin'* quietly. Not that either of us has reason to find fault with our own children. But there's things goin' on we can't bring ourselves to approve of. Father"—sig-

nificantly emphatic, for the elder had knocked down the tongs and when he picked them up, fallen to work upon the fire—"Father,—*he* will have it that ways that was suitable and ruleable in his young days is all right now. *I* say times has changed, and we had ought to change with them. I made up my mind, weeks ago, that Sarah wasn't goin' on no straw-rides *this* winter! *I* say, Dominie, that it's better to be a bit overly-careful than too free-and-easy. I will say for Sarah, she took it beautiful, when I told her that what was right and proper for her brothers, might not be quite the thing for her. The boys went and she stayed, as meek as you please, at home to practise her songs for the concert. Mr. Lang doesn't care much for frolics that may give him cold. He has a delicate throat, and he having all the management of the concert, it would never do for him to run no risks just now."

The Dominie wondered to his confidential self as he had often before, why this excellent woman—and most of her congeners—affected doubled negatives in animated discourse. He said aloud:

"I was delighted with Sarah's singing at the rehearsal last Wednesday night. I stopped at the Academy to hear it. We are likely to have a great success. I knew Sarah had a fine voice. This winter's practising has developed it wonderfully. Margarita and Carrie Corlaer sang a pretty duet, and did it well."

The mother beamed satisfaction.

"*There* are two girls that stayed home to-night, I'll be bound! Will is off to Philadelphia on a business trip. Of course, he's out of it. I *was* a little surprised when Mrs. Corlaer said that neither of her daughters was goin'. She didn't make a point of tellin' her reason. She just dropped the remark in her quiet way that Will

was away from home and she didn't care to have the girls go without their brother. *I knew what she meant!*"

"It mightn't be a bad idea if she set him—or somebody else—to watchin' that youngest girl of hers at other times and seasons!" struck in her husband, abruptly. "I'd rather my girl should go on fifty straw-rides with decent fellows than to be takin' up with a cub like that Bogue Smerden. And that's what *she's* doin', if half I hear is true. I seen her myself a couple of times, strollin' in the woods back of my mill with him, and once I came upon them sittin' close together on a log by the creek, talkin' very confidential. I'm no gossip nor meddler in other folks' matters. I only say what I've seen with my own eyes. If Wilhelmus Corlaer ever gets a notion that Jake Smerden's son is courtin' his daughter, there'll be the mischief to pay. *I* shouldn't like to be the one to tell him."

"*Father!* I call that backbitin', if not bearin' false witness!" began the wife in horrified protest.

The Dominie took up the word.

"I am astonished to hear this," he uttered gravely. "Very much astonished! I should never have thought of connecting the names of the two families. Jake Smerden's reputation for dishonesty and drunkenness is known through all the Valley. And from what I have heard of the son, he is coming on along the same road. Carrie is a lively, light-headed girl and, as the youngest of the family, she has had her own way more than the others. But I can't think that she would flirt with Bogardus Smerden. I didn't know she was even acquainted with him."

"Nor she wouldn't have been in the old time!" interjected Mrs. Van Dyck, disdainfully. "You can't recollect it, Dominie, for it was before you came to us, but

Father and I do! How the Smerdens never thought of associatin' with nice folks in these parts. As you say, the father was a common drunkard and a gambler to boot. All the money they have was made by the rise in the price of land round about Mr. Corlaer's iron-works up there in the mountains, and in cheatin' and horse tradin' an' buyin' lottery tickets."

"Mother!" this with affected solemnity of rebuke from the chimney-corner. "Who's talkin' scandal now?"

Before she got out the retort trembling upon her lips, the gaunt sister-in-law pushed back her chair, wiped her hands upon her apron and moved quickly around the table to set ajar the door leading into the hall.

Mrs. Van Dyck smiled indulgently:

"She likes to hear Sarah sing," she whispered loudly, nodding sympathetically at the visitor.

He recognized the prelude to the then-new duet—"What Are the Wild Waves Saying?" The aunt must have been familiar with it also, for it was not Sarah's voice that led off. The teacher sang well and with expression. His mellow baritone rendered "Paul's" questions clearly and with feeling.

"What are the wild waves saying,
Sister! the whole day long?
That ever amid our playing,
I hear but their lone sad song.
What are the waves repeating
Ever the whole long day?
Is it a voice of greeting
Or a warning that calls away?"

A wandering gust of wind unlatched the door of the music-room at this point. The aunt made a step for-

ward and laughed like a pleased, eavesdropping child. It was plain that, as she craned her long neck eagerly, she had a sight of her darling while she sang the next verse. The Dominie watched her compassionately. He had never seen such abject adoration in human visage. He had surprised just that expression in the topaz depths of his Ponto's eyes, upon turning away from book or desk, to find that the faithful creature was waiting patiently to be noticed and caressed by his absent-minded master.

"The poor woman may be three-quarter-witted," he remarked to his wife in describing the scene, "but she has a soul and a heart. And with heart, and soul, and strength, she worships that girl!"

The Dominie clapped his hands softly as the two voices rose and swelled harmoniously in the last lines—

"The voice of the great Creator
Dwells in the mighty tone."

He would have added, "Well-done!" had not the listener at the inner door suddenly torn it open and disappeared in the farther room.

"What upon earth!" ejaculated Mrs. Van Dyck, jumping up.

Her husband and pastor followed her in time to see the astonished teacher struggling to free himself from the clutch of the big, bony hand upon his collar and to ward off the blows the left hand was dealing upon his head and ears. Sarah screamed piteously:

"Auntie! oh Auntie! *don't!*"

The Van Dycks, husband and wife, precipitated themselves upon the wrestling couple; the Dominie's powerful grip tore the young man from the hands of his assailant.

The woman babbled and spit out invectives in her mongrel dialect, brandishing the empty fists, until the sobs of her name-child penetrated ears deafened by fury. The transition from rage to tenderness was as amazing as the paroxysm of unreasoning anger had been to the beholders. Falling upon her knees beside the terrified girl, she gathered her closely in her arms, cuddling and cooing as a mother to her wounded nursling.

“Come! Come!” she pleaded, rising to her feet and drawing the girl up with her. Lifting her in her embrace, she made for the door.

“Bad *homen!* Beat!”

Mrs. Van Dyck took command of the situation when the teacher and minister moved to interfere.

“Let them alone! She will come all right now! Once she gets Sarah upstairs, she will be like a lamb. Go with her, daughter!”

The Dominie took a long breath as the pair disappeared.

“Does she often have these turns?”

“Not once in ten years!” It was still the wife who had words and wits within call. The teacher was adjusting his collar before the oval mirror at the back of the room. “I haven’t seen her behave so since the time she saw Tom Blauvelt rompin’ with Sarah, tryin’ to get a flower away from her. That was when Sarah couldn’t have been more than fifteen. Sauchy took it into her head that Tom was hurtin’ her, and she flew at him like a mad cat. Sarah is the apple of her eye, you know.”

Norman Lang’s pleasant laugh interrupted the tale. Running his hand through his disordered hair, he brought into the group a handsome face to which the colour and smile were restored with marvellous quickness:

"That accounts for the whole affair! I was beating time rather vigorously over Miss Sarah's head, and her aunt thought I meant fight. I'll be more careful next time. Don't say another word, my dear madam! All's well that ends well! It *was* funny, though!" with a yet heartier laugh. "I thought the house was tumbling about my ears. I have not been boxed so soundly before since I left off roundabouts. I only hope your daughter is no worse for her fright!"

The respectful accent and sincere concern betokened breeding and fine feeling.

In reviewing the queer happening in his return tramp over the snow-fields, the Dominie paid him a merited tribute: "There's gentlehood there, and no mistake! It is a good thing for those young yokels, the Van Dyck boys, to have such an example before them, day after day."

Then he fell to wondering if he had indeed seen something in a girl, sitting on the hither side of the third sleigh, muffled in a red blanket shawl, which made him think of Carrie Corlaer. He was quite sure of the identity of the fellow whose arm encircled the red-shawled figure, "to keep her from falling out" of the open vehicle. It was a common trick with Valley beaux in the circumstances.

Bogardus—inevitably shortened to "Bogue"—Smerden was the black sheep of the county. He had left school at twelve, and refused to go back. Coerced by his father, and cajoled by his mother, he condescended to attend the Academy for four winters. Then he ran away and did not show up in New Jersey for three years. Apparently, he had happened upon nutritious husks, for he brought home a new suit of clothes, a banjo, and enough negro melodies to support his assertion that

he had toured the United States with a minstrel company. Since the prodigal's restoration to his father's house he had "clerked it" for a few months in a none-too-reputable country store up the mountain, quitting the position for the yet more equivocal berth of barker-keeper in a roadside tavern on the outskirts of Millville.

He never came to church. In fact, the family held a loose connection with a church nearer their home than the highly-respectable organisation that had never flourished more than under the present incumbent of the ancient pulpit and parsonage.

"A sorry lot—root and branch!" meditated he, aloud, as was his wont in lonely places. "And this puppy is the worst of the combinery! The idea of his lifting his eyes to a Corlaer—a *Corlaer!*"

He spat it out viciously into the snowy stillness. He had reached the Church corner and paused to look down the road to the stately homestead beyond the bridged river. It was spacious and well-built and draped with associations of the founders of home and fortunes, that lent it dignity in all the countryside. The master was autocratic, and more respected than beloved. Nobody doubted his integrity as man and citizen. It might be truly asserted that substantial residents of the Valley yielded to him ungrudgingly the honor due the leader in church and community.

The Dominie spat again—this time literally—in entering his own gate:

"That *skunk!*"

CHAPTER IV

THE Dominie's keen eyes had not played him false after all. The wearer of the red blanket-shawl was Carrie Corlaer, and the arm that encircled it belonged to Bogardus Smerden.

Wilhelmus Corlaer's youngest-born was not habitually deceitful. In her own estimation, and according to popular report, she was not a derelict in filial piety, albeit as frolicsome as a puppy.

Her father would forbid her association with Bogue Smerden. Therefore, she took care that he should not know that she ever met him in sequestered places, and sat by his side upon mossy cushions by the creek. It would be harder to keep from him her participation in the sleigh-ride set for the full moon in December. Aware that her mother would oppose the prank as firmly, if less violently, than her father, she never hinted so much as an inclination to join in the "revelry by night." A former schoolfellow, who was a confirmed invalid, lived three miles from Kinapeg, and two days before the date settled upon for the jaunt to Ryerson's, Carrie expressed a desire to visit the sick girl. She took a hamper of delicacies from her mother's storeroom with the dear lady's love, in the roomy sleigh, along with a trunk containing enough clothing to last a week if she cared to remain so long. Everything depended upon how Mary Wortendyke was. It was a real charity to cheer the poor girl up when she had her bad turns!

"You could hardly do a kinder thing," the father

added to his "good-bye." And—as the sleigh glided out of sight, to the fond mother—

"After all, the minx has a good heart under her mad-cap ways!"

"One of the tenderest hearts in the world!" assented the lady, warmly. "She will settle down after she has had her share of fun and frolic."

The Wortendykes were in the schemer's confidence. The only son of the widowed mistress of the home was to be one of the party, as Carrie knew. The rest was plain sailing. Young Wortendyke passed the injunction to secrecy along the line of sleighs before the procession came in sight of the Corlaer house. The prank of the recalcitrant girl added zest to the occasion. She made no secret of it at supper and in the succeeding frolic in the big parlour of Ryerson's. There was a famous candy-pull, and, while the candy was cooling and stiffening, a royal romp over Blind Man's Buff, Copenhagen, and (incidentally) kissing-games galore. All was open and above-board and had the sanction of hoary tradition.

The Dominie was awakened from his soundest sleep by the resounding chorus and the tintinnabulations of the fast-shaken bells, "keeping time, time, time,"—to the young voices.

"We won't go home 'till morning!"

roared bass and tenor, bearing up lighter and tuneful chords of contralto and treble.

Then a shout arose that checked the song in full blast.

"Three cheers for the Dominie!"

The three-times-three was seconded by a harmonious blast from fifty pairs of lungs—

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

The sash of a front window shot up and a big towel was shaken violently in response.

"And why not?" he answered his wife's shocked ex-postulation when the melodious racket swept out of hearing. "It's all sheer natural exhilaration of youth and health. Tipsy fellows don't sing like that! I'm proud of my boys and girls! Proud of them!"

"But the drinking songs, Ed! And stopping in front of the Parsonage at two o'clock in the morning——"

"*Three* o'clock, my dear! Be accurate! I never had a higher compliment than to be told twice over that I am a jolly good fellow. I hope and pray I may never give them reason to think otherwise!"

He was deep in his sermon for next Sunday, two days after the straw-ride, when Rebecca Jane's premonitory tap was followed immediately by the apparition of her dusky face around the edge of the door. In her heart of hearts, she considered it "great nonsense, when a body knew it was one of the family that wanted to come in." The tap was particularly unnecessary in the case of one who hummed incessantly when sweeping and dusting.

"Like a Brobdingnagian bumble-bee!" the Dominie had grumbled to his wife, years agone.

The city-bred partner shook her head despairingly. "She says she 'doesn't know she's doing it 'til somebody speaks of it.' Her husband drank and was often cruel to her and the child. She owned to me once that 'Sam had a most-a-norful temper when he had had a glass of hard cider. 'Twas when he was in them fits that I got into the way of singing hymns and psalms to myself, makin' melody in my heart unto the Lord, seein' there was no one else to help me bear it.' Since she told me this I can put up with her music better than before. I

usually recognise the hymns she is repeating to herself, and fancy how they comforted her in the dark ages. And they *might* have been negro melodies, you know! We have much to be thankful for that they are no worse."

She had hummed—

"A charge to keep I have——"

all the way up the stairs to the door of the third-story study, where sat the Dominie at his desk before a big fire.

"Mr. Corlaer wishes to see you, Dominie, and if it's convenient, he'd like to come up here, he says."

The pastor was on his feet and at the door by the time the last syllable left her lips. His senior elder was not the man to make an idle request. Leaning over the balustrade, he called out, in the freedom of intimate friendship:

"Come right up, won't you, Mr. Corlaer?"

Meeting the guest upon the upper landing with cordial hospitality, he led him into the fire-lit sanctum.

"Sit down! Sit down! my dear fellow! Take off your overcoat! The thermometer must be in the neighbourhood of zero this morning—well down to zero!"

The two men presented a marked contrast as they drew chairs to opposite sides of the hearth and faced each other. Wilhelmus Corlaer was over six feet in height, and so straight that every inch of his stature told for all it was worth. His thick, grizzled hair was pushed back from his forehead and looked the whiter for the warm tan of the strong face.

The born master of men spoke in feature, expression and gesture. In pulling off his driving-gloves and hold-

ing his hands to the blaze, supple, powerful fingers were defined by scarlet gleams between them.

Have I said that the Dominie of the Kinapeg Church was reckoned the best-looking man in the county? A head shorter than his visitor, he was every whit as manly in carriage, and as symmetrical in build, with square shoulders and full chest. His dark hair had not a silver line in it; his complexion had the ruddy glow of perfect health; his voice was round and hearty.

The term "all-around man," had not been invented then. Wilhelmus Corlaer phrased it, mentally, in facing the friend with whom he had come to take counsel.

At the last monthly meeting of the Consistory, that body had reported favorably upon the petition that the projected concert to be given the day after Christmas, might be held in the church-building. It was for the benefit of the Dorcas Society which ministered to the necessities of the few poor members of the church, and to the scattered population of operatives in the Valley, and about the "Works back in the mountain."

The program was unexceptionable in the opinion of the grave and reverend body to which it was submitted.

"The Messenger Bird," a duet sung by the Misses Corlaer; "What Are the Wild Waves Saying?" a duet for tenor and soprano; "Be kind to Thy Mother," in full chorus, and several anthems, carried the day by a unanimous vote, the more enthusiastic because every man present had daughter, son, or sister among the performers. Mr. Corlaer had voted with the "ayes" without demur. In fact, his approbation was so frankly expressed that the preamble to the business which brought him to the parsonage was a surprise that fell just short of a shock upon the auditor's ears.

"Dominie! I am not sure that we were wise in opening

the church-doors to the concert! Something has come to my ears to-day that makes me think we would do well to reconsider the resolution."

Answering his interlocutor's blank stare as though he had voiced his amazement, he went on:

"You may well be surprised that I should say it. I was fully in accord with the spirit and action of the meeting, as you know. But last night I was waited upon by a deputation of young men: Jacob Blauvelt, Thomas Schuyler, Elbert Doremus and John Demarest. They have been forward in arranging for the Christmas concert. It seems that worthless vagabond, Bogardus Smerden, took his banjo along on the sleigh-ride the other night, and played and sang at Ryerson's in such fine style that he bewitched the party. In talking it over afterward, it occurred to the boys and—you may be sure—to the girls, too! that it would be a capital idea to work him and the banjo into the concert."

"*No!*" stormed the Dominie, finding his tongue.

"Yes, *sir!*" contradicted the other, as sturdily. "It was seriously proposed to have that jackanapes on the platform in front of the pulpit to sing nigger songs to his banjo! Of course, I said at once that I did not believe you would countenance such desecration of a house-of-worship. If you wish to call a meeting of the Consistory, I have my sleigh here and am ready to drive around the neighbourhood to secure a quorum at short notice."

The Dominie kicked his chair back and strode through the room, his fists clenched and his square jaw set like a vise.

"Not at all, sir! *not* at all! I take it upon myself, as President of the Consistory and the pastor of this Church, to forbid the thing peremptorily—out of hand!"

It is not to be thought of for a moment!—not for the fraction of a second! That's the end of it!"

The elder had seen his superior in office at the white heat of righteous indignation upon a few former occasions, but never so wrought up as now.

"I was sure that you would negative the motion at once," he rejoined, cooling as his friend heated. "Indeed, I asked the young fellows why they had come to me, and not to you, first. I have no more authority in the Consistory, or Church, than any other member."

The Dominie stopped suddenly in his tramp, unclosed his jaws, as if a sudden thought had dawned upon him, then shut them again more tightly than before. Was Carrie's infatuation for the "jackanapes" counted upon as a lever to move her father?

"None of your young people went on the sleighride?"

"None, I am thankful to say! Will is in Pittsburg; Margarita was at home with her mother; Carrie has been on a visit to Mary Wortendyke for nearly a week. I am glad of it, now that I know a fellow like Bogue Smerden was invited to join the party. I said something of this to the boys last night."

"How did they take it?" queried the other with lively interest.

"Oh, they looked sheepishly from one to the other, and John Demarest ventured the remark that 'maybe he isn't as black as he is painted.'

"Whereupon, I asked if Smerden expected to black his face and wear a woolly wig at the concert. I may have been a little tart. But the picture of Bogue Smerden and his banjo figuring in a church-concert was rather too strong for the old-fashioned father of a family."

He was on his feet, buttoning his shaggy great-coat over his chest.

"It's all right then, Dominie? Shall I report the decision to the Committee? Or, tell them to drop in and get it direct from you?"

"Neither, thank you! I meant to call upon Mrs. Blauvelt this afternoon, anyway. She is not well. I'll contrive to see Jake, who can take my message to the others. The notion is preposterous—utterly and insanely preposterous!"

He "contrived" to interview young Blauvelt in the barn when he had taken leave of the invalid. After a frank, kindly exposition of the reasons for refusing the petition submitted to him, he further contrived to find out, without asking a question, that Carrie Corlaer *was* of the moonlight company.

"It's safe telling you, Dominie," grinned the young farmer. "You're the last man on earth to give a secret like this away. One and all, we were bound not to let on that she was there. We drove down to the Wortendykes' to get her, and dropped her there on the way home. She is her father's idol, for true! But we all know he is as hard as nails when his back is up. Another thing I'll let you on to. It was she who started the plan of having Bogue and his banjo. We were ready enough to back her up after hearing him. He makes the banjo fairly *talk*! Mother was dead against our going to Mr. Corlaer about it. She was shocked at the notion of a banjo and darkey songs in church. But Carrie Corlaer and the rest of the girls were so set upon it that we promised to see what could be done. We knew if Squire Corlaer could be brought over, nobody else would say 'No.' "

The minister may have winced inwardly. His face was clear and kind in bidding the youth "Good evening!" and until he had passed the first bend in the road.

Then he whistled and said something between his locked teeth.

He was deeply concerned and sadly perplexed by the innocent revelation of the farmer-boy respecting the outrageous indiscretions of the unsuspecting parent's favourite child.

"There's mischief! there's downright ruin in this!" escaped him. "How far am I justifiable in helping to deceive those who ought to put a stop to it?"

CHAPTER V

MY LADY GREENSLEEVES, alias Smiling Spring—was never in unseemly haste to enter the Kinapeg Valley.

The hill-tops were still white with snow in the clearings separating forest-tracts, one mid-March day, when Wilhelmus Corlaer, striding down to the lowlands after a visit to the woodcutters at work upon the upper acres of his “grant,” stopped to take off his overcoat and throw it over his arm.

“Whew! it might be May instead of March!”

The mercury had soared fast since he climbed the mountain at ten o’clock of the forenoon. He carried into every department of labour the tireless energy and rigid attention to detail that had won wealth and fame for the Ironmaster. He had made a thorough examination of progress and prospects to-day, arriving on foot, and tramping over at least two miles of woodland before he joined the men at their homely midday meal about the fire, over which they boiled coffee brought in their pails from home, and fried eggs and bacon to accompany homemade loaves produced from their baskets.

The employer was wiser than his generation in urging that a full hour should be allowed to the “noon-spell.” So, when he passed around his own supply of tobacco at the end of the meal, the men took the half-hour’s smoke and talk as a thing of course, sitting upon convenient stumps with their feet to the fire.

While work was on, he was an acknowledged martinet. Those who had felt most severely the weight of consequences attendant upon laziness, inefficiency or dishonest dealings, never accused him of a refusal to listen to both sides of a complaint, or of grinding the faces of the poor.

Nobody dreamed of playing the courtier. The younger men called him "Mr. Corlaer." To their seniors, he was "Wilhelmus," or "Corlaer." He may not have been popular. It is certain that few thought of loving him. He was esteemed for his sterling qualities of mind and character, and honored for his services to the community.

It was three o'clock when he bade a cheery "good-bye" to the men and set out upon his homeward way. The rude road, kept open by loaded sleds that had plied up and down since New Year's Day, was getting rough now. The landholder congratulated himself upon the diligence of gangs that would transport the bulk of the lumber to lower levels before the packed snow became slush, and the slush March mud. He was in a genial mood, altogether. Lumber was rising in the market, and he had great store of seasoned timber cut in November and stored in sheds in the Valley, ready for shipment. His iron works were never in better condition. His son's tour of Pennsylvania foundries and mills had brought him back to work in health and spirits, and with enlarged ideals of business-methods and the ways of the active outer world that must make for his permanent improvement.

He had been intolerant of the lad, no doubt. The intolerance of a successful man for an unambitious son is of a bitter and peculiar type. The awakening must have come sooner, had he been of a more lively cast of mind, more quick to see and more alert in action.

"More like Carrie, for example!"

With the thought went a smile rarely seen upon the firm mouth, except when she was present, or mentioned. The winsome little vixen! She never wheedled him, as is the manner of some girls, when she wanted anything.

She might be tricksome and a tease, but she drove straight at her purpose. She had invited herself to go with him to Millville last week, and, on the way, told him point-blank that she wanted a hundred dollars.

“Right away and cash down, Daddykin!” she said as they neared the town. She had invented the name for him, and while it shocked her mother, it tickled him amazingly. “I want you to let me go with you into the bank and draw the money with my own hands. I’d like to play the millionaire just for once. I am not sure that I won’t have it paid in silver dollars,” pursing her small mouth into a rose-bud reflectively. “Unless you think it would be too heavy a load for me to carry?”

Her deferential appeal overcame the pretence of reproof with which he had meant to meet the request. He took her into the bank with him, wrote the cheque under her eyes, and led her up to the paying-teller with—

“Mr. Clarkson! this young lady is taking her first lesson in banking.”

He had further promised the witch not to tell “a living soul that she had the money.”

“Until I give you leave, you know. There’s a big surprise in that hundred dollars for more than one person.”

“I trust you, little girl!” the father had replied, seriously.

What a treasure he had in the guileless darling who made light and music in the old homestead! He ought to be a glad and thankful man, this perfect spring day!

The “wood-road” he had traversed in all its uncon-

scionable windings, was joined and intersected by foot-paths here and there. The highway was still a quarter of a mile away when an abrupt crook in the road brought him almost against a grotesque figure, standing stock-still at the junction of a narrow trail that twisted out of a thicket of scrub oak. It was a woman, so lank and so closely swathed in a gown of brown linsey-woolsey that she seemed as tall as the man who accosted her pleasantly:

“Ah, Miss Sauchy! how do you do? You almost frightened me, coming right upon you in this lonely place!”

He held out a friendly hand which she apparently did not see. Looking directly in his face, she raised a covered basket carried in her right hand.

“Eggs!” she projected harshly at him. “Marshy Morris. Set! Hens?”

He understood. Marcia Morris was a noted chicken-raiser, one of a colony of colored folk, clustered about the foot of the mountain back of them. Sauchy Van Dyck had charge of the poultry-yard upon her brother’s farm. She had walked three miles to get a setting of eggs with which to “cross the breed” of her flock.

“Ah!” he rejoined kindly, as to a child. “I hope they will hatch out all right.” Lifting his hat, he would have passed, but she barred the path. The prominent grey eyes did not leave his. Her large, hard features worked painfully. It was like a mental ineffectual birth-pang. Her mitten hands pointed up the twisting trail.

“Somebody *there*,” she brought out hoarsely. “Lost this!” She dragged from her cloak-pocket a horse-shoe. “Not find it! Smerden-Isha? No! No! No!”

The last monosyllable was almost a shriek. To pacify her, the mystified man accepted the horse-shoe. It had

apparently been lost recently. The wet slush was still clinging to it.

"Who, do you say, lost it?" he demanded, articulating with forced distinctness. "Smerden-Isha?—did you say? Which way did she go?"

"No! No! NO!" as excitedly as before. "Get her! Run! *Fast!*"

It would do no harm to indulge her. She was lashing herself into a frenzy, all the while gesticulating in the direction from which she had come. The tortuous pathlet was crossed, a hundred yards or so back, by a by-road leading to the outskirts of the village. He would lose little time by pretending to obey her. Somebody or something had frightened the unfortunate creature, perhaps the man whose horse dropped the shoe. The "Smerden-Isha" was no clue. It might well be that some woman of the shiftless tribe had played a trick upon the witless egg-gatherer.

All this flashed through his mind in less time than a slower brain would have formulated it.

"All right, Miss Sauchy!" he agreed, again lifting his hat. It was instinctive courtesy to the lowly and suffering that most unequivocally set upon the man the stamp of "gentlehood." "I'll look for him and give him the shoe. He can't go very fast without it. Good-bye!"

She was still standing by the clump of scrub-oaks when he glanced over his shoulder from the "cross-cut road" into which the pathlet debouched.

Although a direct route to the main thoroughfare, it had been little travelled that winter. It was steep, and rutted unevenly to dodge clumps of muddy snow and projecting roots from the trees that met overhead. Swinging the horse-shoe in his hand, as he forged upward, the Ironmaster did not wonder that it had been lost. No

man in his senses would think of driving through the short-cut when five minutes more would put him into a decent road. The ill-conditioned track plunged down as abruptly as it had mounted, and, gaining the summit, the pedestrian who, by now, was berating himself for setting out on the silliest of wild-goose-chases, beheld, lumbering slowly from hillock to root, a light buggy containing a man and a woman. The top had been lowered to escape collision with tree-boughs, and the first thing the pursuer noted was that the man had his arm around the woman's waist, and that her head drooped lovingly upon her escort's shoulder. At the second glance he overtook the buggy in three mighty leaps, and had the horse by the bit.

Margarita Corlaer had once angered her sister by saying that "Bogue Smerden looked like a biscuit doll." It was a face as colourless as unbaked dough that stared upon the father of the girl within his embracing arm. The violent start that dislodged her head from its resting-place brought the dread apparition at the horse's head within the range of Carrie's vision. She squealed shrilly:

"Father! Father! How did *you* get here?"

"I came for you! Get out of that at once! Do you hear me?" for she had wrapped her arms about her companion's neck and was crying to him to "save her!"

Her father left the horse's head, strode to the side of the carriage, undid the flaccid hold of the lover's arm, and lifted the struggling, screaming girl to the ground by force. Then the paralysed tongue of her doughty protector moved audibly for the first time:

"Please, Mr. Corlaer! don't scold her! We were just taking a little ride. I'll take her right home if you'll let her go!"

If white fury could blanch to a more livid whiteness than that which had lent to Wilhelmus Corlaer's visage the aspect of an avenging angel in the sight of the guilty pair—it blazed out when, in dragging Carrie from the vehicle, he brought to light a new, tightly-stuffed valise, marked upon the end which was uppermost—"C. C.; Kinapeg, N. J."

He seized it, relentlessly, and threw it to the ground. Then he grasped Smerden by the collar and hauled him over the wheel.

"You pitiful, lying *hound!*!" he hissed hotly between clenched teeth. "You would steal my child, and then sneak away with a lie in your mouth to save your wretched carcass! You are not man enough to stand up to your part of the bargain! I couldn't punish her more than to let her go with you! But you will finish your little ride alone after I have done with you!"

He was a head taller than the slim young fellow with the doll-face, but he was double his age. Smerden was in the habit of speaking of him to his sweetheart as the "old gentleman," and to his comrades as "old Corlaer." He may have dreamed hazily at the crucial moment of the scene, of slinking behind the disparity of years as his excuse for not resisting the assault. He wriggled away from the iron clutch upon his collar, and, in the attempt, pulled one shoulder and arm out of the coat he had unbuttoned on account of the warmth of the day.

"That is right!" ejaculated the other, savagely, and then and there proceeded to belabour with bare hands the shirt-clad shoulders and back, the round cheeks, the ears and head—in fine, whatever portion of the writhing frame presented itself conveniently for his purpose.

Carrie cried piteously, imploring her father "not to hurt him!" until a queer curiosity took hold of the shal-

low nature. Sobs and entreaties were hushed in the horrid fascination of watching the fight. For, if the individual attacked did not, in modern slang, "put up a fight," he held up his arms to ward off the sledge-hammer blows rained down upon what might be described as the points of least resistance. The movement was balked instantly by the capture of both slender wrists in one of the Ironmaster's mighty fists. One hand could do the work. It was all over in three or four minutes. The *coup de grace* was dealt in a kick that raised the hapless victim clean from the ground and deposited him in a mud-puddle. The beaten wretch had not endured dumbly "the kicks and cuffs of outrageous fate." He had begged abjectly for mercy, as a school-boy pleads under the lash. When landed in the miry gutter, he lay prostrate, his face in his hands, shaking with impotent sobs.

Compassion got the better of Carrie's curiosity:

"Father! you haven't *killed* him, have you?" she moaned, clasping her hands, but making no motion to approach the forlorn figure.

"Killed him? No! That kind isn't so easily killed. Get up, you baby!" touching Smerden with his foot. "I'll turn your horse around for you!" suiting the action to the proposal. "I don't think you care to go down to the village just now. Get along home, and let your mother put you to bed!"

Carrie Corlaer had vowed to her lover an hour ago, that "no power in heaven or upon earth could lessen her love for him."

She had been feeding her imagination upon Mrs. Southworth's novels for six months back, and honestly meant every word she said during the first half of the "cross-lots" drive. The fair eloper was never more in love with her black-eyed, peach-bloom-cheeked swain than

up to the actual instant of the apparition of the avenger at the horse's head.

Yet—she positively shrank from laying a finger upon the be-mired fright that picked himself up at the victor's bidding, and, wiping the blood from his nose upon a torn shirt-sleeve, shambled toward his buggy. He was more than beaten. He was ridiculous, and it is love of a stouter quality than the Carrie Corlaers of society are capable of, that can outlive that debasement of an ideal.

Without the exchange of a parting look or word with her late-betrothed, she crept at her father's heels down the dirty road until the man and wagon were left out of sight. Then she whined piteously a last appeal:

“Daddykin, dear! you aren't going to make me walk all the way home?”

“You, are, going, to, walk, every, step, of, the, way, home! You may be thankful I don't make you carry this, too!” turning the big valise around to display the inscription. “I suppose this was part of the surprise you were to get up with that hundred dollars?”

He had no answer beyond a fresh outbreak of sobs.

Dominie de Baun was summoned to the Corlaer house that evening by a note from the mother of the wayward girl. It was late when he brought home the saddest face his wife had ever seen him wear after a pastoral call.

“Tired, darling? yes, and sick! sick at heart!” he returned to her tender solicitude. “Come up to my study. Somehow I can talk it out best there.”

Like the tactful wife she was, she asked not a question until he had lighted his pipe and donned the dressing gown she had warmed at the study-fire. The unseasonable heat of the day had brought to pass a fine

chilly rain. She had foreseen that his coat would be damp.

Seated by his side, and presently stealing her hand into his, she heard the ugly tale.

By the time the ill-matched pedestrians got home, Carrie was utterly exhausted and had to be put directly to bed. A hard nervous chill supervened, and the mother pleaded vainly that the family physician be sent for. The father peremptorily forbade any interference with his plan for getting the truth from the culprit and her accomplices. Somebody had brought the empty new valise into the house, and somebody had carried it out full. As sternly inflexible as when he had torn her literally from her lover's arms, and as harshly as he had bidden her walk the weary mile home over rutted road and sodden meadow,—he had stood over her with a steady cross-examination, rivalling the abhorrent “third-degree” of a half-century later, until he tore the truth out of her, bit by bit.

Her own maid had been bribed to convey into her young mistress's chamber the purchases made in Millville by Carrie and her confidante, a younger sister of Mary Wortendyke. The maid had watched her chance to get the packed valise out of the house one night, and down to a back lane where Bogardus Smerden was lying in wait for it. The Smerden family were in the plot, of course. That was not to be wondered at, galling as the fact was to the man whose fathers would not have deigned to set one of the crew with his flocks. It was a bitter morsel to him to glean, little by little, the humiliating fact that the intimacy between his daughter and the ne'er-do-well whose touch, in her father's opinion, was a disgrace, was known to half the neighbourhood.

“He cannot speak of it,” said the pastor to his soul-

mate, "but his wife told me he is terribly hurt that, as he says, not one of his old and trusted friends dropped a hint to him of what was going on.

"That hit *me* hard! hit me hard! For I heard the story, weeks and months ago, and kept it from him. He had a right to be warned! a father's right to protect his daughter's reputation and happiness. I can't forgive myself! *can't* forgive myself!"

"You meant it for the best, dear! Mr. Corlaer is not one who would encourage interference in his family affairs. The poor foolish girl will suffer most."

"Don't you believe it! don't you believe a word of it! She is beginning to sit up and take notice already, and now that her father has got all he wants to know out of her—she's as hard as flint and stubborn as a mule. Not that she cares much for the fellow. Indeed, her mother tells me that she is angry with him for somehow mismanaging the elopement she thought would be a fine frolic. 'He didn't try to keep father from taking me away from him!' she confided to her sister. 'I wouldn't have gone one step if I had thought he had so little of the spirit of a man. He just let father bang him about as he might a puppy dog!'"

The Dominie stopped to laugh, and his wife joined in.

"Maybe the best way of curing her was to show her how he'd behave under fire!" she opined. "I am wicked enough to wish he had got a worse pummelling."

"Don't be troubled on that score! He was pounded into a shivering jelly! I really believe the thing that came nearest curing that little fool was the nose-bleed." He laughed out aloud now. "It was providential that Mr. Corlaer went up the mountain to-day. More providential that he happened upon poor Sauchy on his way down. I shouldn't say 'happened,'" sobering into

gravity that was akin to solemnity. "Nothin' 'happens' in God's kingdom. I have been racking my brains to guess how that three-quarter-witted creature got hold of the clue that saved the girl from life-long misery. She must have been lurking in the bushes when the young folks passed by, and maybe saw the rascal with his arm around the girl. *Jehoshaphat!*" letting his pipe slip to the floor. "That's what she meant by '*Smerden-Isha!*' Corlaer told me that she said it over and over, and got more excited each time. That was it, as sure as you're alive. She didn't want the fellow to make her his wife!"

In his excitement, he fell to pacing the floor, plucking at his lower lip, and frowning violently.

"I've got it! I've struck the trail! My dear!" Coming back to his bewildered wife, he took her face between his hands and stooped to kiss her, almost reverently: "We are told that praise is perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. It is yet more wonderful that, through the babblings of this poor afflicted creature—a semi-idiot, as she is called—should be brought deliverance of a whole family from disgrace—perhaps the salvation of a soul! Truly it is the Lord's dealings, and it is marvellous in our eyes—marvellous in our eyes!"

CHAPTER VI

EVERY family of considerable size has its paragon. Every community has a show-piece that may be labelled "Phenomenon."

Timothy O. Brouwer, Esq., was at once the Paragon of his family and the Phenomenal human product of his native county. His birthplace was among the foot-hills that hemmed in the fertile, sunken plain on the west. A story-and-a-half house, framed with axe-hewn logs, and clapboarded with rough planks, was the abode, for a score of years, of worthy Jan Brouwer, his wife and seven children.

He tilled fifteen acres of unpromising land, thick-set with stones of assorted sizes. He herded sheep upon the rugged foot-hills, and burned into charcoal timber of his own felling. His thrifty vrow raised poultry and pigs; wove into linsey-woolsey the wool shorn from the sheep, and made every garment worn by the family. All the children were duly sent to the nearest school from the time they could trudge two miles a day. Dutch phlegm made young and old disdainful of public opinion and contemptuous criticism of their frugal habits, and the straits to which they were subjected by downright poverty. Dutch valour stimulated the least of the tribe to hold his own against adversity.

When Timothy O., the eldest boy, disappeared from his accustomed haunts, it leaked out that he had gone to sea with a compatriot of his father who had found

his way, in some unaccountable manner, to the cabin in the Jerseys, and offered to take the son of his friend as cabin-boy on a three-years' cruise.

The aforesaid leakage was succeeded by the statement that shipmaster and cabin-boy had brought up somewhere in Brazil, and gone into some sort of money-making business in that benighted district of darkest South America.

In after years, when the Family Paragon had burgeoned into the neighbourhood Phenomenon, the de Bauns—husband and wife—who were naturally and unavoidably Dickens-devotees, used to borrow freely from Caleb Plummer's talk of his boy "in the Golden South Americas." As the Brouwer boys grew into husky workmen, and the girls rivalled the mother in housewifely arts, no secret was made by them of the fact that "Brother Timothy" was softening the rough places of their daily existence. A horse and wagon made church-going feasible for "mother and the girls"; they dressed "more like other folks," remarked the neighbourhood gossips, and "had it easier" in every way. Before the old Dutchman was gathered to his fathers, he had removed, with all his flock, to a comfortable farmhouse, so near to the church that the squat tower with the steady finger pointing heavenward was the first thing upon which Jan's eyes opened daily for the last ten years of his blameless existence. He closed them in such great peace as is the heritage of the Father's children. For his eldest-born laid his fingers tenderly upon the stiffening lids that hid the unseeing eyes, the last gaze of which was directed to the returned exile's face.

He had been in North America then for six years, a prosperous New York merchant, with the courage of his conviction that he was a Paragon, Phenomenon and Non-

pareil, incorporated into one self-made man. He had married an Englishwoman in Brazil, and brought home with him three children. His wife presented him with twins six months after he took possession of the handsome town house. When she died, he mourned her all the more sincerely because he said little of his desolation. Instead of engaging housekeeper and governess, he besought his two younger sisters—aged respectively twenty and twenty-two—to live with him and take charge of the motherless children.

“There must have been a strain of good blood there somewhere—probably in a remote generation,” the Domine and his wife agreed in thinking, twenty years later.

By then, father and mother had left Timothy O. Brouwer the head of the family with respect to seniority.

His eldest son was now in charge of “our Branch House in Rio.” In dropping the “Janeiro,” he implied a hail-fellow, well-met familiarity with the foreign capital of “the Golden South Americas.” He had “erected” (his word) what came so near being, in the eyes of the community, a palatial residence, that nobody cavilled at the tremendous emphasis he stamped upon “*My House*” when the word formed itself upon his lips.

A second son was partner in “our New York House.” Grace, the eldest of the three sisters, was happily married to a New Yorker. The twins, Ruth and Rhoda, were rather handsome, well-educated, somewhat accomplished, and—as might have been anticipated—decidedly dashing. The aunts were intelligent, modest, and less provincial than would have seemed to be inevitable from their secluded lives. They brought to bear upon the difficulties of their novel environment the earnest industry that had gained for them prizes in the country school-house, and proficiency in every branch of domestic

routine. The problematic strain of good blood that was the key to the puzzle in Mrs. de Baun's mind, may have accounted in part for the fact that when the HOUSE was finished and furnished, the spinsters twain fitted into the place of hostesses with quiet grace that amazed the "old families," and won respect from all classes.

The renovated farm-house was now tenanted by a younger brother, Joachim, and two elder sisters, Amelia and Dorcas. They made no secret of the truth that "Brother" supported them, one and all, and did it ungrudgingly. Joachim was forty-five years old when he became the nominal protector of his sisters and head of the home. At twenty, he had been crippled by a falling tree. He was honest and industrious, with a genius for gardening.

He sent prize turnips and carrots to the county Agricultural Fair, and bordered the patches of vegetables with rows of tulips and roses that arrested the eyes and steps of passers-by.

By degrees, the Valley population fell into the way of speaking of the four maiden-sisters as "The Old Ladies Brouwer," and their resident brother as "Mr. Joachim." The chief of the clan was in everybody's mouth, "Timothy O." I doubt if man, woman, or child ever bothered his or her head to inquire for what intermediate name the "O" stood.

If Wilhelmus Corlaer's wealth, enterprise, education, and the prestige of ancestry made him the backbone of the community, Timothy O. Brouwer impersonated the muscles. The de Bauns shook with laughter behind the parsonage-blinds as the wife said, "Swelling visibly before my wery eyes," when the magnate swaggered along the road, promoted by him and his HOUSE to the dignity of an Avenue.

"It isn't the Fable of the Frog and the Ox over again," answered the husband. "He is the whole Ox, and competing with himself."

Competition reached its height, socially, in the scheme he broached boldly at a called-Consistory meeting from which the pastor was respectfully requested to withdraw, temporarily. Timothy O. was neither elder nor deacon. Once, when the possibility of election to the deaconate was tentatively broached in his hearing, he negatived the suggestion definitely.

"No! friends and neighbors! I can serve the church and township more effectively in my own way, time and manner. Call me a 'privateersman' if you will. We saw a good deal of execution done down in Rio by privateersmen. Call upon me for advice or funds when you need me. I trust I shall never be found backward in such exigencies."

When the Dominie had retired (temporarily) the privateersman unfolded his secret orders (self-imposed).

On the first of May, or thereabouts, and on the first of November, it was the custom of the parish to give a Donation-party at the Parsonage. It was, now, the first week in April, and for two months, preparations for the Spring "function" had been in hand. The new and grandest feature of the occasion was the presentation of an Album quilt to the Dominie's wife. The project was kept from the Parsonage household—an easier task than one might be inclined to believe who is unfamiliar with the workings and windings of such organizations. The Kinapeg people had proved their ability to keep other and more dangerous secrets than the plan of the prospective presentation.

Every man in the Consistory could have described the quilt, now nearing completion. The squares were of

uniform size, of the best quality of Wamasutta muslin. In the centre of each was a five-pointed star, "applied" to the muslin, and between the points, wherever the maker chose to put it, was her autograph, wrought in chain stitch with turkey-red thread. Strips of turkey-red separated and defined the several squares.

In addition to this central attraction of the party, there were to be the customary offerings, surreptitiously introduced into the barn, corn-crib, hay—"barrack," kitchen, cellar and larder pertaining to the parsonage. It was a standing rule that the woodshed, and, in the Autumn, the coalbin, should be filled.

All this the privateersman took for granted. His master-mind had conceived a project that would stamp this particular Donation-party in golden letters upon the memory of grateful pastor and generous donors.

Life-Insurance policies were comparatively new at that day. Timothy O. was the first man in the county to take out one upon his own life.

"For ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS, my dear sir!" he said to Mr. Van Dyck, introducing the aforesaid bantling of his teeming brain. "Should I die to-morrow and my estate be found to be bankrupt—" smiling broadly at the daring hypothesis—"there would still be enough left to keep my family from poverty. I have come to talk with you to-day about getting out a policy of insurance upon the Dominie's life, for the benefit of his wife. Of course he will have to be taken into confidence. On account of the medical examination and all that, you know. But it's to be a surprise for her. It really seems providential that the date of the Donation this year happens to be Mrs. de Baun's birthday. My plan is to get out a policy for five thousand dollars. The premium will be one hundred-

and-fifteen dollars. I shall head the subscription-list with fifty, and I guarantee that Corlaer will do something handsome. Yes! I know it has to be done every year, but you may count upon me for a cool fifty as long as I am above-ground, and my family will do as well afterwards. My notion is to have the affair at my **HOUSE!**"

He paused for a long second to let the announcement do its work upon the stunned auditor. The latter gasped and swallowed hard, his eyes bulging from the sockets. Before he found words, the magniloquent discourse went on:

"Yes, *sir!* there must be nothing mean about the Occasion. The whole congregation will be invited. We must have Mrs. Van Dyck upon the committee of ladies who will present the quilt to the Dominie's lady. Mrs. Corlaer and, maybe, one of my sisters, will assist her. As the party will be in My House it would be perhaps only proper that *I* should present the policy to Mrs. de Baun. All those things can be settled later. The first step is to secure the money for the policy."

A shrewd third party to the interview might have gained an inkling of the business-methods by which Timothy O. had climbed to opulence. When he had an end to gain he knew how to butter fingers, and to play cunningly with the tongue upon the weakness of his interlocutor. He had settled in his mind what sum it was meet for the farmer-miller to subscribe. Knowing that his neighbour never decided a business-matter without privately consulting his wife, he secured the active interest of both in his project, and carried to the next house in his route the assurance of their cordial co-operation.

All went merry as a chime of wedding bells up to the actual moment of the presentation of the Policy. The

great rooms were thronged with parishioners, dressed in their very best clothes. Hut and hall had yielded their quota of curious guests. Timothy O. boasted to his confrères of the ease with which he had secured the requisite sum.

He exuded happiness and patronage from every pore of his perspiring body, as he stood in the centre of the front parlour, in full view of the crowded hall and the back-room, after the quiet presentation of the quilt was over. Four women—characterized by the host as “leading ladies of the congregation”—had held the four corners of the big construction, and their four daughters upbore the intermediate sagging stretches of red-and-white. Mrs. Corlaer said, simply and clearly, that the women of the church and parish asked Mrs. de Baun’s acceptance of the token of their affection, and the pastor’s wife, with the like well-bred composure, thanked her and those she represented. Then four men, appointed by the host, swept the quilt into folds and carried it out of sight.

The great Event and the Man of the Hour had the centre of the stage.

Timothy O. had mounted a stool that he might not be unseen by the most distant unfortunate of the throng. Foremost in the circle, a few feet from him, were the pastor and his consort. Both were smiling undisguisedly—an acute observer might have imagined—amusedly. The Dominie had confided to his helpmate, for the hundredth time before they left their home that evening, his conviction that the cultivation of a sense of humour should be included in the curriculum of every theological seminary in the land.

“If the truth were known, it would be found that you and I owe life and reason to the blessed truth that we

have the ability to pluck fun out of the nettle of daily Parsonage Life."

And the wife replied, "Ed. de Baun! you never said anything half so wise in your sermons!"

Nobody could have accused them of laughing at the scene, and the principal actor therein. Everybody could see that they were enjoying it—or something else—hugely.

"Friends, neighbours and acquaintances!" thundered the big voice, as the big hand held aloft a folded paper. "We have collected here this evening on what I have meant shall be the happiest sort of an Occasion. I don't need an introduction to a single individual one of you. Before I enter upon the business of the hour, I must tell you how glad I am to see every one of you. *I say!*—you all know how it happens that I, a poor farmer's boy, should be able to entertain you in what travellers and city-people have designated as a 'Mansion.' I have cast in my lot with you, as you have reason to know. I have wealthy and influential friends in the city in whose homes I and mine would be more than welcome. I might have filled these Rooms—" a large gesture of both hands expressive of their dimensions and appointments—"with the rich and great of the earth, as one might say. Instead of which, like the Prince in Scripture our pastor read about last Sunday, *I have gone into the highways and hedges and gathered thence my guests.*" *

The Dominie and his wife were not smiling now. His jaw had dropped slightly, and his features had the rigidity of one shocked into incredulity of the evidence of his senses. His wife had paled suddenly, and her eyes were fixed upon the wide smile of the orator.

"My worst enemy can't accuse me of purse-pride, or

* A literal report.

snobbery. And this I *will* say for each and every one of you—in the campaign I have made in the effort to raise the premium upon the Life Insurance of which I am now going to speak, I had the easiest time I ever had in collecting money. I believe not a dollar was given unwillingly. That speaks well for the Kinapeg folks. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I present to Mrs. de Baun, the respected and belovèd wife of our respected and belovèd pastor, this policy for **FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS**, as a token of the esteem in which we hold her and her reverend partner. We will pay the premium every year as long as we live, and provide for the payment thereof in case of our respective demises.

“We all regret, I am sure, the absence from this Festive Occasion of our honoured citizen, Mr. Wilhelmus Corlaer. He was called unexpectedly up to the ‘Works’ to-day, hoping to be back in season to join in our convivialities. I hope he may yet appear in our midst, but he has missed the gems of the occasion. I mean, of course, the Presentations.”

He got down from the stool and handed the folded paper to Mrs. de Baun. She bowed silently and her husband stepped to the impromptu rostrum:

“Dear, *dear* friends!” The round, sonorous voice contrasted so gratefully with the bovine roar that had filled halls and rooms a moment before, that an involuntary sigh of relief fluttered through the audience. “I do not try to thank you for this new proof of loving kindness to me and mine.

“Words do not come easily to a man whose heart is full and running over, as mine is just now. I thank the God and Father of us all, every day, that I can say proudly, ‘I dwell among my own people.’

“Such people, as I verily believe, no other man ever

had the joy of serving. I pray, too, that He will help me to serve you, in His name, and in His fear, from this time forward, better than I have ever done before. I speak for my wife and for our children in acknowledging the unfailing goodness that has starred our united life in Parsonage and Church. God bless and reward you, one and all!"

"It was oil upon the troubled waters!" whispered Mrs. Corlaer when the pastor reached her through the tossing sea of outstretched hands and the April mists of tearful eyes that greeted the close of the brief address. "I am glad—and sorry—that my husband is not here."

"I am unfeignedly sorry!" was the rejoinder. "I needed him to help me out. I hope to see him yet to-night. He told me he might be detained late at the Works, but he would make quick work of the drive home. I wish I could be by when he hears the report of the orations!"

CHAPTER VII

A COMPLICATION of mishaps had thwarted Wilhelmus Corlaer's intention to be at home in season to dress for the *Donation* party. A man from the city, who had an appointment to meet him at twelve o'clock, did not appear until two; the foreman had a long and tedious report to render, and much need of counsel, and the men were to be paid off, the morrow being the end of the month.

Altogether, the day was trying to spirit and to flesh, and the various hindrances were peculiarly exasperating to a man with strictly punctual habits and with scant charity for shiftlessness and shortcomings. It was well that he was alone in the homeward journey, he confessed to himself, in gathering up the reins at eight o'clock.

"I ought to have been in *Kinapeg* an hour ago," he said to the foreman, in refusing his invitation to supper, "I can't waste a minute more!"

"Your horse will take you down the mountain in less time than any other animal in the county could!" was the foreman's parting remark. "I wish *I* were going to ride behind him!"

Then it was that the horse's master congratulated himself inwardly that he had horse, carriage and road to himself. He knew when he was utterly out of sorts—no man better—and he would need all of the twelve miles lying between him and home, to work himself into a tolerably decent mood.

The tribute to his horse was a drop of healing ointment. He was a powerful bay stallion, with a pedigree longer than that of the Corlaers. Carrie had named him "Sultan," and the title went well with his superb action. The moon was at the full. Mr. Corlaer had gone a mile before he bethought himself that the Donation party must be in progress by now. A grim smile twisted his mouth at the recollection.

"No great loss without some small gain!" he muttered. "I shall miss Timothy O.'s speech!"

The road took an abrupt turn at that point, and the horse shied away from a black figure standing well out into the highway.

It retreated to the side of the track at the horse's plunge, but raised an arm in entreaty, or warning. Corlaer reined up and spoke sharply,

"Who are you? And what do you want?"

He saw now that it was a woman who advanced totteringly to the side of the buggy. The first words told him she was a negro.

"I suttlenly is mighty sorry I skeered yo' horse, Mars-ter! I never meant to!"

"I know that! But you stopped me. What do you want?"

"Maybe yo' heered of the fun'r'al on de top o' de mountin to-day? A coloured lady 'twas dat died—Mrs. Daphne Mo'ton was her name."

"I heard something of it. Well?"

"She was my a'nt, suh. I come all de way from Millville early dis mawnin', on a-puppose fur to 'tend dat fun'r'al. A man name' Jack Sutton, what live in Kinapeg—he done brung me up de mountin, and he promise' sure and sutten, to come back fo' me by t'ree o'clock. When he ain' come, I started fur to walk down to meet

him. I jus' *got* to get back to Millville to-night! I thought maybe you, my marster, mought give me a lif' down's fur as Kinapeg, seein' you're maybe goin' dat way. I know a man thar what will take me down to Millville, ef so be we don't meet dat low-down nigger Jake Sutton."

"I know him, and we are not likely to meet him," responded the listener, dryly. "He is probably dead drunk in a fence-corner. I will take you as far as Kinapeg. Get in! Whoa, sir!" to the dancing horse. "You see you startled him, and he is very spirited. Are you all right now?" as she seated herself lumberingly beside him. "Go on!"

At the word and the slackened rein, Sultan gave a great bound, and set off down the hill at a half-gallop, then steadied into a fast trot at his driver's command.

"He's suddenly mighty gayly!" commented the passenger, admiringly.

Her companion did not answer, and not a word passed between them for two miles more. Wilhelmus Corlaer could recollect when there were ex-slaves in his family—trusted old servants who were under age at the date of the emancipation of negroes in New Jersey, and who had voluntarily remained in the service of their former owners for the rest of their lives. One had nursed him from babyhood. He called her "Mammy"—after the old custom—when he was a grown man. The memory touched a tender spot in his heart.

"You say you live in Millville. You talk like a Virginian. You were not born at the North, were you?" he broke the silence by saying.

His passenger started and shifted her position: "Naw, suh!" she drawled, the southern accent more pronounced than ever before. "I was born an' raise'

down in Virginny. How come you guess so true? Mos' folks say I talk mighty like de Yankees"—giggling hysterically.

Corlaer did not reply at once. When he did speak, his manner was abstracted, his tone cold.

"I have travelled in Virginia and have friends there."

"Yas, suh?"

The interrogative inflection invited further communication, but she got none. Her abrupt start had twitched her skirt aside, and revealed a stout boot that was never intended for a woman's foot. The gentleman traced it above the ankle and swiftly scrutinized the rest of the figure. It was dressed in deep mourning. In the clear moonlight, he even observed that she wore black cotton gloves. A crêpe veil depended from her bonnet and reached her lap. The cotton gloves held fast to the one incongruous feature of her attire—a muff of raccoon or fox-skin, as shabby as it was out of season. If she wore it for warmth, why not put her hands within, instead of upon it? As he glanced again, the moonbeams struck brightly upon something that flashed like metal.

To suspect with Wilhelmus Corlaer was to act, and without loss of time.

If the chance passenger were a man in disguise; if that were the butt of a pistol, or the blade of a dirk, gleaming in the stray ray that slanted across the crêpe veil, to the metallic object tucked into the useless muff—the sooner the drama was ended, the safer.

In response to the irritable jerk upon the curb, Sultan reared upright, and pranced in sidelong zigzags that apparently angered the driver to fury. With a harsh shout at the unruly beast, he caught at his whip, missed it and knocked it clear out of the socket to the ground.

"I can't see what has got into this horse to-night?"

he ejaculated, wrathfully. “*Whoa!*” to the mettled creature who was once again upon his hind-legs, and snorting with rage or fear. “I am sorry to trouble you to pick up my whip, but you see I cannot let him go for a second. *Whoa, sir!*” bringing him with difficulty to a stand in the middle of the road and pulling hard with both hands upon the reins.

Grasping her skirts with one hand, the woman leaped the wheel with the agility of a cat, and stooped for the whip. As she touched it, her ears were smitten by the mad beat of hoofs, the roar of wheels. Carriage and driver were out of sight before she could turn around.

In another moment, the mountain-road was as still as death in the white moonlight. The very echo of flying feet and the rush of wheels had died away from the woods.

His master’s knowledge that foot-pads seldom travel single kept Sultan at his best speed until the foot of the mountain was gained. At the first leap that left his passenger in the road, Mr. Corlaer had seen that the muff was in the bottom of the buggy, and put his foot upon it. Arrived within sight of the lights of his valley home, he brought the slackened speed of the flight to a halt, and examined the article at his leisure. It was old and worn, but big enough to secrete a double-barrelled pistol. The fugitive held it up in the radiance flooding the sleeping valley.

“Loaded!” he said aloud, thrusting the ugly thing back into the muff. “Who hates me enough to want to kill me in cold blood?”

He was not debating the question when his wife, daughters and son returned from the “Occasion.” He had ordered supper and eaten it, and sat at his desk in the sitting-room, seemingly engrossed in the accounts spread

before him. He had never appeared more interested in reports of church gatherings than in that which the three rendered in unison. If he did not laugh as heartily as they had hoped he would at the climax of the oration, it was hardly to be expected that an officer of the church and a neighbour, who described the excellent traits and valued the generosity of the self-made man, should not be mortified at the exhibition of colossal conceit and vain-glory which must discount his worth in the eyes of the entire community.

"Don't look so solemn, Daddykin!" protested irrepressible Carrie, hanging herself about his neck, as they parted for the night. "It was the funniest thing that ever was, just to see how the people looked when he told them he scraped them up from the highways and hedges to 'furnish the feast with guests.' "

She screamed afresh at the remembrance. Her father undid her arms and put her aside gently, but decidedly.

"Mr. Brouwer is a good man, daughter. I can never forget that he shares his wealth with his brothers and sisters, and cheerfully. He is liberal-handed and kind-hearted. I do not think he has an enemy in the world. I wish I could say the same for your father!"

He sighed heavily in putting her aside, and walked out of the room.

"I have made up my mind to one thing!" said Carrie, as she let down her blond tresses and drew them fondly through her fingers, eyeing the fair picture reflected in the mirror. "When I get married, it won't be to a wet-blanket of a man, who keeps his foot all the time upon the soft pedal. I mean to have my swing. I've never had it in all my life."

Accustomed as Margarita was to her light-headed

sister's vagaries, she could not comprehend how she could talk of marriage and men with the recollection in her mind of the disgraceful episode hardly two months old.

"I don't think it kind or respectful for you to speak in that way of a father who is loving and kind to you—if to nobody else!" she uttered in her best elder-sisterly manner. "*You* ought to be the last person on earth to criticise him."

"Who said anything about father?" retorted Miss Saucebox, turning her head to thrust the tip of a bright red tongue at the mentor. "I was thinking of Dominie de Baun! Mr. Lang and I were having a jolly time in a corner to-night, when up comes my reverend gentleman and took a hand. I asked him if it wasn't true that everybody supposed Mr. Lang and Sarah Van Dyck were engaged. 'Except,' I said, 'the people who believe that she and my brother will make a match some day?'"

"Carrie Corlaer! you never said *that*! I can't believe that even *you* could so far forget yourself as to make such a speech. And just now, when all of us ought to be particularly discreet! You will start everybody to talking again!"

Since that first horrible day when her father dragged her home, a criminal to be tortured by his cross-examination, and the subsequent conviction of an unpardonable offence against family pride, filial duty and social laws—the offender had met with the indulgence usually awarded to the returned prodigal from the days of Absalom down. Both parents had been more gentle with her than ever before, tolerant of her foibles and solicitous of her health, which must, according to maternal reasoning, be imperilled by hysterical weeping that endured for a night, and the consciousness that she was under paternal ban. The father did not relax his severity of tone and look for

three whole days. Then, won over by the pale face and wet eyes to which the mother had succumbed within an hour, he gradually fell into the old ways of petting and condoning that had spoiled her all her life.

It was, therefore, perfectly natural that she should be confounded and incensed by her sister's audacious rebuke.

With flaming cheeks, and eyes too bright for tears, she faced the offender:

"Isn't that *too* much like girls that never have a beau and are ready to tear out the eyes of one who may have any man she chooses by lifting a finger? Your prudish airs are just plain spite and envy. Don't you suppose I saw you looking at me as I sat in the corner of the dining-room with Mr. Lang all-attention, and ready to fall at my feet if I gave him the least bit of encouragement? That sort of thing won't go down with me, Margarita Corlaer! Yes! and I gave your precious Dominie a dig, too, let me tell you!"

Contorting her pretty features into a ludicrous, if distant likeness of her pastor, she went on in a fancied imitation of his voice and speech:

"I don't listen to gossip, Carrie," said the saintly gentleman. "You know "They say" is generally half-a-lie. I shut my ears to such prattle." He meant to insult me, but I laughed in his face."

"Girls!" said Mrs. Corlaer at the opening door, "I must ask you not to talk any longer. I want your father to go to sleep. He is fairly worn out, and the sound of your voices reaches our room when the house is so still."

"I'm sure *I* have no temptation to say a word more!" Carrie began, braiding her hair with rapid fingers. "And I hope Margarita has finished lecturing me because Mr.

Lang paid me more attention to-night than he showed her. Mercy knows, *I am not trying to catch him!*"

"My child!" remonstrated the mother, "you are tired and excited. You will be more like yourself in the morning."

With the admonition went a beseeching glance to Margarita.

The story is so old that it would be stale but for the continual repetition in every generation and in Christian homes. That the sinner may be reinstated in the self-conceit that wrought his ruin, is of prime importance. The basic fact that if he had not spent all his substance, and his stomach had not revolted at the diet of butterless husks, he would probably never have bethought himself of the comfortable quarters he had deserted for the foreign tour—weighs nothing with parents, rejoicing in the sight of the beloved face and compassionate of the wasted form.

Carrie's was the brightest face at the breakfast table. Margarita had had her "little weep" upon her confidential pillow and the swollen eyes betrayed it. Will hurried through the meal to take his father's place at the foundry for an hour or two, having been informed that the senior had something on hand that would detain him at home.

Mr. Corlaer looked grayer and older by ten years than on yesterday morning. He drank two cups of strong coffee, and said little while he tried to eat. He had considerably postponed the revelation to his wife of the events of the journey down the mountain, but her instinct told her there was thunder in the air. When he was ready, he would speak. Carrie prattled fitfully, in disposing of a comfortable breakfast. It was no concern of hers if other people chose to be miserable and sulky.

Experience told her that they would "come around" in due time. Nobody was cross to her long.

She whiled away an hour in the garden, bantering the gardener, and gathering violets to fill the great glass bowl that stood upon the hall-table all the spring. Entering by the back-door, with her apron heaped with purple-and-white blooms, she was met by a maid with a message from her mother:

"She's been calling you all over the house, Miss Carrie. She wants to see you in her room the minute you come in."

The daughter lengthened the minute by waiting to have the bowl emptied and washed for the reception of the fresh supply of flowers. She turned the contents of her apron into it, and carried it with her in obeying the summons. She would get water in her mother's room and arrange them there. As she skipped up the wide staircase, she carolled blithely:

"O, whistle and I'll come to you, my lad,
Tho' father and mother and all should go mad!"

She had sung the Scotch ballad a dozen times to the accompaniment of Bogardus Smerden's banjo, and as often while Norman Lang played the piano. It is quite certain that neither of the gallants was in her shallow mind, or that she linked the words with the escapade that may have been said to illustrate them.

CHAPTER VIII

WI利HELMUS CORLAER sat directly opposite the door which was ajar, and his daughter's eyes fell upon him as she pushed it open. He sat still and looked at her. Her instant and disrespectful thought was "Like a graven image!" She had advanced but a few steps when her mood changed. Her father's stern silence, the portentous gaze that terrified the culprit more than a cyclone of invective could have done, were all too familiar to those under his rule. It froze her on the threshold. She had never made a fairer picture than that framed in the door during her moment of consternation. She was dressed in white; her rust-coloured hair was an aureole for the face from which even fright had not driven the rose-tints heightened by out-door air and sun. She held the bowl, crowned with the white-and-purple violets, directly in front of her, as one might present an expiatory offering to an offended judge.

Thus, while one might have counted ten. Then, sense and hardihood returned.

"Why, daddykin!" gasping out a weak little laugh. "You frightened the life out of me! What is the matter? Are you sick? Or has some dreadful thing happened?"

Setting her bowl down upon a stand near the window by which she now perceived her mother sat, work basket on knee, she began to arrange the flowers mechanically, but with a show of nonchalance worthy of a more finished actress.

"Emmeline said you wanted to see me, mother."

Wilhelmus Corlaer's complexion had been zinc-grey until she plunged her hands into the heap of violets. A red torrent surged up to the high temples. Without rising, he seized the bowl with one sweep of his arm and threw the flowers out of the window. Then he pointed to a chair set ready for her within a few feet of him.

"Sit down!" he commanded. "I declare—" in a growl wholly strange to her ears—"I wonder, sometimes, if you have any heart at all, or any brains! *I* sent for you, not your mother! She has heard the story *I* have to tell you. *I* shall not tell your brother and sister unless you force me to do so. Are you listening? This is business, *I* would have you know! We have had too much of silly affectations. No! Not a word! and—do you hear me? no crying! And don't interrupt me! *I* shall make short work of the story. It isn't so pleasant that *I* should care to spin it out."

As he paused, the terrified girl stole a glance at her mother. Her hands were folded upon the pile of stockings in her basket, her eyes were fixed upon her husband. Her visage was as unfamiliar as his, and as much of a mystery to the stunned beholder. The mouth was set and resolute; the eyes were soft with sadness and yearning—but for the husband she had loved and served for forty years. In a sort of impersonal, hazy way the girl saw beyond her mother, the parsonage and white spire of the church. A queer speculation darted through her puny mind. She wondered if the Dominie would have to be sent for when her father had done with her, as had happened that other hateful time?

Her father had begun the story. He wasted not a word. He essayed no artistic effects. He told how a man, dressed like a woman and talking like a negro, had

managed to get a seat in his buggy; what had excited his suspicions of foul play, and how he had escaped death.

The girl forgot to wonder what she had to do with the almost-tragedy while she listened. Her natural manner and tone went with the cry—

“Oh, Daddykin, dear! how *dreadful!* Do you really think he would have hurt you? Are you sure it was not a woman, just playing a trick? And you say you found a pistol in the muff?”

“I said all that! I am going to put a question to *you*, now!” His face was yet more grim.

“Look at me, Caroline Corlaer! *Who* has travelled with negro minstrels, and is most likely to imitate the negro dialect to perfection? *Who* is the cleverest actor you know? *Who* comes of a family that neither fears God nor regards man’s rights? *Who*—and this is the most important question of all—who, in this community, has most reason to hate me for crossing his path when he would have stolen one of the dearest things to me upon earth? most reason for wishing to kill me for flogging him within an inch of his life?

“No! no!” pushing her back when she cried out in horror, and would have fallen into his arms. “We have had enough of scenes!”

The girl interrupted him. She was crying bitterly. “Father! I can’t believe that anybody who I—who cares for me—would do such a thing! It must have been a tramp—maybe from the city—who heard you had money and—and—” The rest of the defence was wrecked by sobs.

“*Stop that noise!*” He had stooped to pull something from beneath his chair, and curiosity stanchéd her weeping for a moment. What she would have described

as a "mangy old muff" was in his hand, and he drew from it a dirty bit of tape made fast to the inside.

"Wipe your eyes, and read that!"

She obeyed. The tape was ragged at the end he held, but she could make out the few letters in faded ink, and penned by an unpracticed hand:

"*B. A. Smerd*—"

The rest was torn off.

"His mother probably had that muff when she was a young woman, before Jake drank up the small fortune she had brought him"—went on the pitiless prosecutor. "Now, my young lady, you may be able to see that, but for you and your underhanded tricks upon parents who trusted you to behave like a virtuous and right-minded woman—but for you, I say—your father would not have been waylaid on the highroad, and run the risk of being shot down like a mad dog."

Carrie was on her knees at his feet, moaning and writhing in keenest anguish. He did not move to touch her. Nor did the mother by the distant window, looking with dry, desolate eyes upon the scene that was half-revealed by snow-wreaths on the November day when her son had cursed, in her hearing, the father whose best-belovèd child now lay under the lash of his merciless tongue. She had pitied her boy, while she reproved him for his wild talk. She felt that her daughter merited all she received.

She heard her husband rise from his chair and open her desk which stood near the window on his side of the room. The rustle of paper followed, and his harsh order to the cringing creature on the floor:

"Get up, and come here! Sit down and write what I dictate—just as I say it."

The dry-eyed mother did not turn her gaze from the

scene under her lookout. Men were bustling back and forth about the Brouwer grounds and house. In the depth of her misery, she recalled that Timothy O. had spoken of it as "a Mansion" last night, and how big he made it look in his speech. The "man who had no enemies!" Her husband—high as the heavens are above the earth in his superiority to the low-born pretender—had been hunted like a wild beast!

Dear God! If his senses had been one whit less acute, he might now be lying stark and bloody in the road, and his murderer free and unsuspected! Her subconscious mind did not lose one word of the letter trembling fingers were tracing upon the sheet laid before the wretched little fool.

"*Bogardus Smerden!*" The relentless voice dictated slowly, dropping each syllable like a pellet of ice. "*My father, Mr. Wilhelmus Corlaer, wishes to inform you that he has two articles belonging to you which were left in his carriage last night. If he had no other evidence of your identity and designs than these afford, he could prove them by passing the pistol known to be yours, and the muff bearing your mother's name, over to the proper authorities.*

"*This he is prepared to do if you do not leave township and State within twenty-four hours after the receipt of this letter, never to enter them again. Should you ever show your face in Kinapeg, my father will shoot you down as you would have shot him down last night, had he not got rid of you by a trick. If he should not be alive at the time of your return, my brother will shoot you, as a duty he owes to his family.*

"*As for myself, I wish never to see your face again, or to hear your name. I despise myself when I recollect that I have ever associated with a man of your stamp.*

"*Caroline Corlaer.*"

"Take care!" admonished the dictator from time to time. "Write plainly, and do not blot it, or you will have it all to do over again." And once—"Take your time! I don't want him to think you were too much agitated to write distinctly."

The victim staggered, in rising to her feet. The last turn of the screw had been too much. With a faint cry of "Mother! mother!" she went down in a moveless heap upon the carpet, striking her head against the corner of a footstool. The father picked her up in his arms, and the mother helped lay her on the bed.

"Don't take her into her room!" she whispered. "Margarita must not know of this. It must be our secret. God help us all!"

She called in no help to revive the unconscious girl. Her husband lingered in the background, shielded from Carrie's sight by the curtains of the bed, until he heard her voice reply to the mother's inquiry—"Are you feeling better?"

"Don't try to get up!" she pursued, soothingly. "Lie still for a while. I will be back directly."

Husband and wife left the room together. There was no one in the upper hall, and he took her in his arms in a long, close embrace.

"The best and truest wife God ever gave to man!" he murmured in a choked voice. "This has been a hard ordeal for you, dear. I can never forget how loyally you have stood by me. And it is really wholesome discipline for her—poor foolish child! It is God's way of dealing with His children to let them bear the consequences of their sins—for a while, at any rate. We must not spoil all by treating her as if she were a martyr."

He never opened his heart except to her, and this outburst was unusual. Lifting worshipful eyes to the

face upon which the last twelve hours had ploughed new furrows, she kissed him in a strange passion of pity and love.

“My darling! when I think what might have been I wonder at your forbearance. I believe that she is cured—and forever!” And from the bottom of the mother-heart—“It is *horrible* to see how cruelly children can make parents suffer!”

He pressed her head closer to his breast. She felt the great heavings that answered her:

“You are right! It must be for our good, or it would not be the same, the world over. And when we would lay down our lives for them!”

It was a relief to them when the piano broke into merry music under Margarita’s fingers. She had no inkling of what had passed in that upper room. To avert inquiry, Mr. Corlaer slipped out of the side-door and visited the stables before strolling back to the house to bid his wife “Good morning.”

Unsuspecting Margarita turned a sunny face at her mother’s entrance, half-an-hour thereafter.

“Carrie has a headache and is lying down in my room,” Mrs. Corlaer said, quietly. “She does not bear late hours as well as you do.”

The daughter interrupted her carelessly:

“I don’t think it was late hours so much as walking in the garden, for ever and ever so long, without a hat. The sun is hotter at this season than she thinks.”

“Perhaps you are right. I was thinking if it would not be a kindness to Mrs. de Baun for you to run over and ask if you can help her get pantries and cellars to rights. Such a big supply of eatables, crammed at random into one’s house, must need to be arranged!”

And in rejoinder to the girl’s cheerful consent—“Don’t

forget to take your parasol, since you say the sun is so hot."

Loving diplomacy had set the domestic machinery into smooth running-order. She carried a cup of tea to the ailing girl, and telling her to "try to sleep," settled herself by the westward window, darning-basket in hand and a nest of disquieting thoughts for company. An occasional glance from the window showed her the flotsam and jetsam of last night's Event. Once she had a glimpse of the Van Dyck carriage at the gate of the Parsonage. Mrs. Van Dyck was on the Entertainment Committee, and had to do with the left-overs and emptied pots, kettles and baskets to be restored to their owners to-day. Sarah got out of the carriage and tripped lightly into the Parsonage gate. Will had been all devotion to her last night. The dread lest her husband might divine the son's infatuation was a gnawing tooth at her heart. The review of what she had that forenoon witnessed lent sharpness to the fang. He was consistently more strict with his son than with the petted youngling of the house. Yet he had not spared *her!*

"How cruelly children can make parents suffer!"

Her own words returned to her with prophetic weight. And her husband's reply—"When we would lay down our lives for them!"

CHAPTER IX

IT was the middle of June and the strawberry season was at its height in Kinapeg. Up to the tops of the forest-crowned hills, one might happen upon sunny reaches of coarse grasses, sheltering ruddy patches of Alpine strawberries, exquisite in flavor and red as coral. The meanest garden boasted a plot of berries, while in the larger and better-cultivated, the broad squares yielded to them were the pride of owners who counted their acres by the hundred.

Those who know something of the model parish and model pastor of my story, do not need to be informed that a strawberry-festival was a spiritual and social necessity when the crop was in its richest prime. Thrifty husbandmen harvested their fruit into baskets, and drove all the ten miles to Millville to pack the crates into freight cars for the New York market. Stunted, gnarled and green berries were all that saw the family-table while the yield justified cartage and freight. To the credit of human nature and everyday religion be it recorded, that the tithe of quarts due THE FESTIVAL was never abated, let the season be fair or foul.

The meeting of the Ladies' Aid preceding the Festival by a couple of days, was the largest of the year, and was "held with Mrs. Van Dyck."

That was the conventional announcement, sanctioned by the usage of ten generations of church-going folk. The proposition made the formula equivalent to a personal and special invitation to every member.

The Van Dyck homestead opened its arms figuratively, and doors and windows literally, to welcome the obedient called-and-chosen. The front door, flanked by narrow side-lights and a fan-shaped window at top, stood hospitably wide, both leaves stretched back to the wall. The hall was roomy and airy, the rear door giving upon a well-shaven lawn backed by barn-yard and corn-field. Beyond this last, half-a-mile away, arose a line of hills swelling in benignant curves against the bluest of summer heavens. The windows of the back-parlour revealed the same view to the groups collected near them.

“A really pretty picture, Mrs. Van Dyck!” said Rhoda Brouwer, in her most agreeably-patronizing manner, one that heightened her already marked resemblance to her father. “I should think you would grow very fond of it.”

The hostess smiled, well-pleased.

“Yes! There ain’t a window but looks out upon some-
thin’ real nice. I’ll never forget, Mrs. de Baun, some-
thin’ the Dominie said the first Sunday he preached for
us as our Pastor. He stayed with us, you see. It was
June and a-most-a-beautiful day. I come up behind him
unbeknownst, and he was a-gazin’ out of the window, like
somebody in a dream. Before he knew I was there, I
heard him say to himself, sweet and solemn-like, ‘The
lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. Yea, I have
a goodly heritage!’ ”

“How beautiful and appropriate!” gushed Timothy Brouwer’s daughter, in her best style. “Mr. de Baun has a genius for saying exactly the right thing at the right time.”

“And doing the right thing at all times!” responded Miss Amelia, one of the sweet-faced “Old Ladies Brouwer.”

Mrs. de Baun’s blush was as quick as a girl’s.

"Thank you all for saying such pleasant things of my husband," she said in the soft voice which was one of her charms. "I know, of course, how good he is, but it is gratifying to learn that he is appreciated by his friends."

"You ain't jealous then?" struck in an old lady from a distant corner, with a cracked laugh.

"On the contrary, the more you dear people love him the better I love you," returned the minister's wife. "I grant you leave to carry on the good work to your heart's content."

Then and there, Miss Rhoda felt herself called upon to contribute an immortal utterance to the store of Confidential Parsonage Stories, without which Dominie and consort would have felt many a pin-prick that now went for nothing.

"I suppose, Mrs. de Baun, that you say, with Shakespeare's Touchstone—'*A poor thing, but mine own!*'"

The delicate bloom of the wife's cheek was carnation under the strain of repressed laughter. Her voice shook:

"No, indeed, Rhoda! I have never dreamed of applying the quotation in that connection." Carefully refraining from glancing in the direction of the Corlaer sisters, who, she felt, were in full enjoyment of the joke, she added, hastily: "I thought we were to see some wonderful work of *yours*, to-day?"

Her husband was wont to declare that her tact was invariable and timely. If she had ever agreed with him she was inclined to change her mind within the next half-hour. Rhoda thought nothing could be more apt than the appeal to her beaming self. Up to that instant nobody seemed to notice that she had brought into the room with her, and deposited upon a table between the

back-windows, an oblong flat parcel about a foot long and, perhaps, nine inches wide, done up in tissue paper. The "execution" of the masterpiece had engaged every hour she could spare from what she spoke of as "social duties"—meaning visits to New York—for the past three months.

She arose, now, with amiable alacrity and brought forward the parcel. Untying a white ribbon, she began to remove the treble foldings.

"I flatter myself that it *is* rather unique!" she admitted. "I learned the Art last winter in the city. It is all the rage there."

Every eye was upon her; every neck was stretched expectantly.

"Excuse me, if I ask you all to move to that side of the room!" was the next preliminary. "I must stand where I can get the best light."

The movement accomplished, she held up a frame, containing, behind glass, something so nearly "unique" that no one ventured a question or other comment than a long-drawn, simultaneous "Oh-h-h-h!" of compressed emotion of divers kinds.

Mrs. Van Dyck was the first to speak:

"Very pretty, I am sure," she said, agreeably. "What is it intended to represent?"

She would have asked the same question had the frame held portrait, or flower-piece.

"It is a landscape some of you must recognise," announced the artist, tolerant of ignorance and rusticity. "I sketched it from my window. You see the creek and bridge in the foreground, the willows on the bank of the creek, and in the background the Corlaer house, with the distant mountains. It is called 'Hair Mosaic,' no materials being used but human hair!"

A burst of amazed admiration partially repaid her for the forbearance she had mustered.

“Yes! Mrs. Van Dyck! every bit of it is *human hair*! At an exhibition of the work done by our class last winter, there were several ‘Family Souvenirs,’ made from the hair of different members of the same family. They are very valuable, as you may imagine.

“You wouldn’t believe how I had to manœuvre to get just the right shades of hair for some parts of this picture. I put the high lights in by robbing poor dear father of so much white hair that he took flight whenever he saw me with a pair of scissors in my hand.”

Half a dozen women were on their knees in front of the show-woman, to gain a better view of the “Unique.” To Mrs. de Baun was allotted a low chair close to the speaker. It was she who made herself heard above the babble of exclamations.

“How did you fasten the mosaics to the paper?”

“It is not paper, but silk canvas of the finest quality, tinted slightly as a background of sky. First, we outlined the pattern. Then we threaded fine cambric needles with the hair and worked it in. ‘Difficult,’ did you say, Mrs. Wortman? Indeed it was! Artistic skill and delicate manipulation were required.”

The landscape was an extraordinary performance. Not one of the spectators had a glimmer of suspicion that it forecast the Cubist Futurist School that was to confound conservative critics, sixty years thereafter. It could but gratify the artist and soften her judgment of her unsophisticated neighbours that, one by one, they made out the features of her picture.

“My! but them willow branches must have been awful hard to put in!” ejaculated the old lady whose laugh cracked in the middle.

Rhoda beamed and scintillated patronage and pleasure:

"Why, Mrs. de Mott! You have used just the right word. It was *hard* to 'put in' those drooping streamers! It took a great deal longer to do the foliage of the willows than to build the whole Corlaer house."

"And if there ain't a cow a-drinkin' out of the brook as natural as can be!" cried the flattered woman, indicating her discovery with a warped and battered forefinger.

Rhoda bridled and chilled.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. de Mott! *that* is a rock! You must have noticed it many a time in going over the bridge."

The pastor's wife instinctively threw herself into the breach:

"I suppose we may thank Mr. Brouwer for that glimpse of sunlight upon the roof of Mr. Corlaer's house? By the way, Carrie"—turning to the girl who was in the forefront of the gazers—"that falls right across your window."

"So it does!" cooed Carrie. Bringing her pretty face nearer to the Unique, she had a discovery of her very own to report. "You painted the sky to make a sunrise! That was a nice notion, Rhoda. But where in all the Valley did you find that bit of red hair to represent the sun? I don't believe it is natural! You *painted* it scarlet! No hair was ever as blazing red as that!"

Everybody laughed, the appeased Rhoda included.

"You saucy monkey! It was the funniest thing imaginable—my happening upon that red hair! We were driving over the mountains—Father and Ruth and I—and there ran out of a mean little house by the side of the

road, the reddest-headed boy ever created. I screamed to Father to stop, and told him point-blank that I must have a lock of that child's hair to make a sun of. So he called the child's mother to the door, and told her I had taken a fancy to her boy's red hair and he would give her a dollar for a lock of it. I don't believe the poor wretch had ever seen so much money at a time in all her life. She cut off enough to make fifty suns and father gave her a paper to wrap it in. I didn't want to handle it! You never saw such a dirty hole as he lived in. There were but three rooms in the house and there must have been ten children! We could see through the door how filthy and horrid everything was. Father says there is a regular colony of them up there, and they are all alike. 'Smerden' is the name."

Margarita grew cold all over, and her tongue froze to the roof of her mouth, while her sister laughed hysterically and talked fast:

"The oddest thing I ever heard in *all* my life!" she giggled, seizing the frame and turning the picture directly to the light. "It takes *you* to have adventures, Rhodie! I declare this is the most curious thing I ever beheld. It gets more and more interesting the longer you look at it. I suppose you will ask a high price for it?"

The big, buxom girl looked down at the lesser, and laid her finger upon her lips, mysteriously.

"That is to be decided by the Ladies' Aid." It was said in a half-whisper. "My wish would be to make a pot of money for the Church by raffling it off. But in this benighted part of the universe, good people have scruples about raffles. So I thought we'd whip the devil 'round the stump by selling the mosaic on shares, and when all the shares are taken, make a present of it to—

you promise never to breathe it to her until the deed is done?"

She stood at her full height, raising her voice as she elevated the picture with both hands in the sight of all.

"Oyez! oyez! Are you all listening? My proposition is to sell this valuable work of art for fifty dollars in shares of fifty cents each, and present it to our worthy and able President—Mrs. Wilhelmus Corlaer. I am glad she could not meet with us to-day. I never was glad of her absence before. It seems to me that she is the one of all others who ought to have this picture. Her homestead is the principal object in it"—designating it with her disengaged hand. "If my project meets with general approval, may I ask our good Vice President, Mrs. Van Dyck, to put the question?"

"Somebody's got to make the motion first," suggested that practical functionary. She had not attended Ladies' Aids forty years without knowing that a motion must be put before it can be voted upon.

Mrs. Sythoff, the relict of a deceased lawyer, made the motion in due form:

"I move that the work of art submitted to us this afternoon by Miss Rhoda Brouwer, be sold by shares at the Festival to be held June eighteenth, and afterwards presented by the Ladies' Aid Association to our esteemed President, Mrs. Corlaer."

It was felt that the widow had never done a neater thing. The motion was carried unanimously.

"Now, you two girls are bound by your word and oath not to let a syllable of all this slip out at home!" was the admonition of the artist and the author of the happy conceit. "It must be a total surprise to your mother." As the buzz of tongues arose, she stooped to say in Mrs. de Baun's ear: "And I shall lose my guess if the Patroon

does not fork out a cool additional fifty in acknowledgement of the compliment paid to the Patrimonial Mansion!"

It was entirely safe to let escape to the discreet pastoress the chagrin never absent from her mind when the old homestead was alluded to as honourable by reason of age and occupation. Yet there was in the corner of her soul satisfaction in the thought that her "sketch" of the Corlaer homestead would hang upon the ancient walls. Timothy O. harboured not a suspicion that his neighbour of the long pedigree was one whit his superior. His daughter had taken in, by painful degrees, the truth as to the relative positions of the two families, and naturally girded inwardly in admitting it.

Margarita Corlaer, as secretary, now made out a list of fancy articles reported by various members. Bookmarks, wrought upon perforated card-board and mounted upon ribbons, held a conspicuous place. One displayed with modest pride by Mrs. Van Dyck, was eight inches long and four in breadth. The purple satin ribbon backing it projected six inches below and above. The design was a goblet embroidered in silver thread, the shadows that rounded the chalice artistically done in shaded greys. Above this hung a glittering cross, shedding threads of light into the depths of the cup. The inscription wrought in gold beads was—

"SORROW, TOUCHED BY THEE, GROWS BRIGHT."

A sudden hush fell upon the company of chatterers as Mrs. de Baun's sweet, reverent tones rendered the quotation. Mrs. Van Dyck broke it at the end of a long minute:

"If it *is* my Sarah's work, I must say it as maybe shouldn't say it—that I never see a handsomer mark.

She begun it in February and has worked upon it pretty nigh every evenin' since. You see, Mr. Lang, he reads aloud to us quite some, and Sarah, she'd take that time for fancy-work. She got the motto from a hymn-book. My husband, he sets so much store by the bookmark, he declares he's goin' to buy it at the Festival. He is bound he will get it and keep it in the old Dutch Bible that he can remember his father readin' out of at family prayers. So Sarah laughs and tells him if he wants it so terrible bad, he's got to pay for it. I guess all men are pretty much alike when it comes to their daughters. My husband sets more store by that one slip of a girl than he does by all his boys."

"It's a pity Sarah's *mother* cares so little for her!" remarked Mrs. Sythoff.

Whereat everybody laughed. The place held by the only daughter in the Van Dyck home was patent to church and neighbourhood.

She slipped from the parlour when her mother returned the book-mark, carrying it with her. The supper which would be served at six o'clock was already laid in the dining-room, and Sauchy was moving about the table to supply a few final touches. She had done all the fine cooking for the feast. Before giving the signal to her sister-in-law that the guests might come in, she would bring mounds of hot biscuits to fill the gaps left by pickles, preserves, cheese and six varieties of cakes and cookies, forming a connecting chain from a huge decorated ham at the lower end of the board to a mountain of cold carved chicken at the upper. At a later stage of the proceedings she would produce bulwarks and palisades of hot buttered waffles. She would hand them in at the door leading to the kitchen-area, Sarah and a couple of her girl-comrades receiving them there, and passing

them around the table. The hostess would pour tea and coffee at a side-table.

Sauchy would see to it that not a detail of the feast was wanting.

She shook her head frowningly at her niece, and motioned toward the door by which she had entered. The girl made a mutinous mouth, and laughed, in obeying the gesture. This was not a time for stirring her aunt up. Cortlandt Van Dyck, the acknowledged humorist of the tribe, was wont to say of her that "she was that sot in her ways, no meetin' house was ever sotter." Now and then a gossip marvelled aloud that Mrs. Van Dyck bore so long and patiently with the nuisance of "the half-crazy old thing." Those better versed in the economies and policies of the household said that the sister-in-law paid her way twice over. Furthermore, it was well-known that by the terms of their father's will provision was made for the maintenance of the semi-imbecile. She was also to remain a resident of the homestead as long as she lived.

CHAPTER X

SARAH was sensibly relieved that she was not wanted in kitchen or dining-room. Nobody would miss her for the next half-hour. It was all her own.

She stole into the sitting-room and shut the door leading into the great hall. The babble of feminine voices flowing from the crowded rooms beyond was like the cawing of crows, mingled with the staccato shrieks of guineafowls.

She sank into an easy chair by the window, overlooking the side-lawn, the mill and the bridge. The ripple of the water, the thud of the mill-wheel and the sough of the breeze in the big cherry-tree embowering the window, soothed the strained nerves.

The farmer's daughter was as ignorant of the duty of "relaxation" as M. Jourdain of the amazing fact that he had been talking prose all his life without knowing it. Yet she relaxed scientifically in the unlooked-for breathing-spell. She made a comely picture, lying back in the old chair that lent itself graciously to every curve of her pliant form, and offered rest to the head. She did not need to turn it to take in each feature of the scene framed by the stooping branches of the cherry-tree. The mill stood at the foot of the hill and the upper story was on a level with her lookout. Front and back doors were open and showed the blue sky beyond. Cort leaned in the doorway opening to the floor. The stalwart frame, clad in irreproachable "jersey," and trousers crisp from

the laundry, stood out well against the dusky interior. Here and there a pencil of sunlight was tremulous with gold-dust,—the floating particles of meal rising from the lower room. A man dressed in white sat just where a beam of shimmering gold fell upon his face. A little way behind him was a third figure, not so clearly defined, his suit of dark-blue blending with shadows lurking in the corners.

Sarah laughed softly in surveying the group. The elderly members of the Aid were to be allowed to depart decorously when the supper was over. Then, the girls, the Van Dyck brothers, Mr. Lang and Will Corlaer, with host and hostess, the Dominie and his wife, were to sit down at a second edition of the feast. Two girls had volunteered to assist the daughter of the house—Matilda Voorhees, a far-distant relative and close neighbour of the Van Dycks, and Tessie Bartholf, who taught the Infant Class in the Sunday School. Both loved young company, and neither was clever or pretty.

“But so good!” Sarah had pleaded to her brothers and Norman Lang. “I should be perfectly happy if I were as good as Tessie Bartholf. I shall not let her know that I asked the Corlaer girls. You see Matilda and Tessie *offered!*”

“May I inquire if you ever overlooked an opportunity to make other people happy?” inquired Mr. Lang.

“Never that I know of!” Cort had responded, and the smile of both parents made cordial assent.

Sarah was thinking it all over as she relaxed limbs and nerves. The memory ran through her like a cool, sweet current, bathing her being in peaceful content. Was there another girl in the world who had so much to make her happy? The second party of feasters would have strawberry ice-cream for supper. Even Mother, the

very soul of liberal hospitality—had agreed reluctantly that to undertake to make it for the whole company “was not to be thought of. The young folks were a different thing altogether.”

A little laugh bubbled musically from Sarah’s lips at the thought.

“Here you are! having a good time all by yourself!”

The door had opened so noiselessly that she had not known she was not alone until Margarita Corlaer spoke.

“Don’t move!” she begged, pushing Sarah back into the chair and pulling up one for herself beside her. “I don’t blame you for getting away from the crowd. How cool and happy you look! I often wonder if you are really and truly so much calmer and more content than the rest of us. I think of the ‘peace that passes all understanding’ when I look at you in church. And you looked the same just now before you knew I was here. Would you mind telling me what you were thinking about? I won’t tell!”

The sisters were as dissimilar in person as in character. Margarita was petite and a decided brunette, with flashing black eyes, delicate features and fine teeth revealed in the smile that lighted up her visage ‘into beauty. Sarah was becoming fond of her. Until within the past half-year, she had never known what a charming girl Will’s sister could be.

“It is no secret!” she answered readily and sweetly. “I was thinking of my mother and how she likes to make everybody happy—especially young people.”

“That is true!” rejoined the other. “You and I have much to be thankful in having such mothers. God never made two better women.

“How quiet and lovely it is in here! May I stay a few minutes? I don’t want to be worn out before we

have our little supper! Who are to be there besides us girls?"

Sarah drew the muslin curtain aside.

"There are three of them! The others are at work on the farm somewhere. They will be in, in time."

Margarita leaned forward, well-pleased.

"The lazy fellows! But what a nice tableau they make! Mr. Lang looks so well in white I don't wonder he wears it so much. You've heard, of course, that we are not to lose him so soon as we thought? It was settled only yesterday, so he hasn't had time to tell his friends. Father has long felt the need of a chemist in his business. He has some project about making steel that he can't carry on without somebody who knows a good deal about chemistry. I don't understand it at all. Only Father told us at dinner to-day that he has engaged Mr. Lang to help him in his laboratory for the rest of the summer. It seems Mr. Lang is a fine chemist.

"I don't know what we should do without him in the choir—and everywhere, for that matter. He is *such* an acquisition to the neighbourhood!"

"He told us to-day that he had made an engagement with Mr. Corlaer that would keep him here awhile longer," said Sarah, in her quietest tone. "We should miss him, as you say. Take care!" drawing her friend away from the centre of the window. "Your brother is looking this way! He might see you!"

"What harm if he does?" Margarita retorted, resuming her former position.

Sarah blushed so rosily that the sister looked askance at her. "I only meant I didn't want them to think we are watching them. Have you noticed how thick the cherries are on that tree? Mother is looking forward already to preserving and pickling them."

Margarita made some indifferent reply and continued to gaze out of the window, abstractedly or wearily. Sarah relapsed into reverie.

Provident robins were building in the cherry-tree. Mingling with the song of bird and stream and the rhythmic pulsing of the mill-wheel, Sarah caught an occasional laugh, or murmur of conversation from the trio of loungers in the upper room over there. She said to herself that she had never been so entirely, unquestioningly happy before in her twenty years of life as on that heavenly afternoon. In the green glooms shed by the thick foliage into the room, she was invisible from without. She did not shrink when Will arose from the bench on which he was sitting, and strolled to a place beside her brother, seeming to peer into the depths of the branches above her retreat. He could not see her! She had sat too often just there with the interior of the old mill in view, not to know how obscure was her coign of vantage.

Had the waking dream been less entralling she might have speculated why Margarita had sought her out just then and there. It was pleasant that Will's sister should make advances toward familiar intercourse. He had never betrayed a gleam of consciousness that the social plane of the two families was not quite the same. All the same, she was flattered by the circumstance that Margarita Corlear had broken away openly from the rest of the guests and come to her. O, it was passing good to be alive this glorious June day, and to be just where she was, with the smell of the lilacs, the love-twitter of the robins and the song of the water, the sight of the tableau of the three across the road, with the shower of gold dust shimmering over them, making the hour perfect!

Margarita broke the spell with a very commonplace query:

"What do you know of Mr. Lang's family? Are his parents alive?"

"His mother died five or six years ago," Sarah came out of her dream to say. "His father died when he was a baby. He does not recollect him."

"Sisters and brothers?" pursued the visitor, judicially direct.

"He has two sisters—both married, one living in Philadelphia, the other in Chicago. His brother lives in Boston."

"You may think it strange that I should ask these questions." Margarita laid her hand caressingly upon her companion's. "But Father having taken him into his office may throw us together socially, and it is natural we should wish to know more about him. Of course, everybody who has moved in good society can see that he is a gentleman, if he *does* teach school for a living."

She rose abruptly:

"I suppose we ought to be going back to the parlours. But I would rather stay here! I wish we could see more of one another. Shan't we keep up the singing-class this summer now that our leader is not going away? Suppose we talk it over after supper to-night?"

She set the seal upon the intimacy by saying, her hand upon the door beyond which the crow-and-guinea fowl concert was still in full blast,—

"I *hope* Rhoda Brouwer has finished taking up her collection by now! I overheard Mrs. de Baun ask her if it wouldn't be better to put off selling the shares for a little while. Rhoda wouldn't listen to her. 'No time like the present!' said she. 'Make hay while the sun shines! is my motto.' Then I got away. What Mother will do

with the hideous thing I can't imagine! The cap of the climax was that dirty brat's hair. The sight of the red dab will always make me sick!"

"I'm sorry!" was all Sarah had time to say.

Carrie met them just without the door of the front parlour and dragged her sister into the front porch for a whispered communication:

"Why *did* you run away? I thought I should never live through it! She let nobody escape. Mrs. de Baun kept her from attacking me, but she screwed fifty cents out of everybody else. She thought the red hair especially funny. One woman asked 'if the fumigating of the "sun" was thoroughly done?' Then everybody who heard it, laughed. Rita! *I died twice!*"

"Hold up your head and seem not to care!" was the sister's counsel. She had scant patience with Carrie's love-affairs and found it hard to forgive her latest folly. Loyalty to the blood obliged her to stand by her.

"The whole affair is disgusting!" she went on to say. "The thing to do now is to behave as if nothing were wrong. Try to forget it all until we have played our parts here."

Had the younger sister lived in our generation she would have registered herself as "a dead-game sport." She pulled herself together, putting up her hands to pat down her ruffled hair, and readjusting her neck-gear.

"That's all right! Now for the rest of the performances!"

The hands of the tall, century-old hall-clock pointed to half-past eight when Mrs. Van Dyck paused in the outer door, serene and self-complacent, to admire the scene without. Her heart was "at leisure from itself," to enjoy it. Supper No. 1 had never been excelled by any similar occasion within the bounds of the parish. Appen-

tites matched the food, and nothing better could be said for either. Supper No. 2 was no less satisfactory to all concerned. Within half-an-hour after the party left the table, every dish, plate, cup and saucer was washed and put away in cupboard and pantry; the hostess had taken off the bib-apron which had shielded her second-best black silk, and washed her hands of further domestic duties for that day.

The moon was at the full. The Ladies' Aid contrived, whenever it could be made convenient, to appoint meetings when there was a moon. There were members living upon the outskirts of the parish who were glad to have the evening illumination upon lonely roads.

The complacent dame stood for a full minute in the shadow of the projecting doorway before she was perceived by the loungers. Chairs were clustered upon the short turf; stools dotted the intervals between chairs, and Carrie Corlaer sat upon a rug she had commanded Cort Van Dyck to bring from the house. He had put it, as she directed, in the fullest beams of the moon, and (perhaps also in obedience to her behest) thrown himself down beside her, a little apart from the central group. Mr. Van Dyck and the Dominie smoked the pipes of infinite contentment near Mrs. de Baun and Tessie Bart-holf. Sarah and Margarita made up a quintette with Norman Lang, Will Corlaer and Case Van Dyck. Jack sat upon the grass, cross-legged, carrying on a cousinly confabulation with Matilda Voorhees.

It was, as the housemother said inwardly to her swelling heart—"a sight any woman might be proud of when so many of them were her own flesh and blood."

What she said aloud was—"My! but I wish you could all stand here and see how fine you look! It is just like a scene in the theatre!"

The men were on their feet simultaneously, but it was Norman Lang who got to her first with the rocking-chair.

"It has been waiting for you all this time!" he declared. "I was getting uneasy lest you might not be coming out to join us."

It was a way he had—and it may have meant next-to-nothing—but elderly folk of both sexes loved him for never seeming to consider them out of the running in any line of life. Without saying it in so many words, he had made the latest comer feel that his enjoyment of scene and companionship would be enhanced by her coming. Inferential flattery, delicately conveyed, is the most subtle and delicious tribute to personal worth and charms one can offer. Mrs. Van Dyck was wont to say of her boarder that he was "*that* kind-hearted!" Her vocabulary would not carry her meaning further.

"It is a thousand times better than any theatrical scene ever set," continued the young man, letting his hand lie for a moment upon the back of her chair—"because the beauty and enjoyment of it are real. The manager who could put this night and this view upon the stage would make his fortune."

Then he went back to the party he had left. The relative positions of the four had changed with the rising of the men at the appearance of Mrs. Van Dyck. Her eldest son had slipped away, and presently was seen going down the hill to the mill. He told his mother next day, that he "hoped he knew when he was an odd number, and didn't care to flirt with his own sister."

Will Corlaer would seem to have been like-minded, for under pretext of showing Sarah the North Star and the Dipper, that hung like so many drops of living light just

around the end of the house—he escorted her to the farther side of the lawn.

“It is not often one sees the stars so brilliant when the moon is at the full,” he remarked, incidentally, in passing the parental pair as he strolled back. “And the Dipper hangs high to-night.”

Instead of seeking her former place where Lang and Margarita still sat in the shade of the lilac bower, Sarah sank down upon the lower step of the porch, near enough to her mother to lay her hand upon her lap. By and by, her head rested against the arm of the rocking-chair, and she smiled up into her mother’s face.

“I wish we could have some music to-night!” the latter said, hastily, in a voice that was not quite clear. “It is all we lack. When I was young we couldn’t be happy on a moonlight evenin’ unless there was singin’. Mr. Lang! Would it be too much to ask you to let us have the song you sung the last night we sat out here? ‘Mary of Somethin’,’ it was. I don’t just remember the name. But it was the sweetest thing I ever heard.”

Norman’s light laugh was pure amusement—not ridicule. Like the “kind-hearted” gentleman he was, he came forward with Margarita, who had seconded the request, and standing by the steps, sent his divine voice into the night:

“I have heard the mavis singing
 His love-song to the morn;
I have seen the dew-drop clinging
 To the rose that’s newly-born.
But a sweeter voice has charmed me
 At the daylight’s golden close,
And I’ve seen an eye that’s brighter
 Than the dew-drop on the rose.

“ ‘Twas thy voice, my gentle Mary,
 And thine artless, winning smile,
 That made this world an Eden,
 My Mary of Argyle!”

Eloquent stillness followed the echo of the last lingering note, returned from the nearest hill. Sarah's head dropped lower upon her mother's arm; Margarita brushed her eyes lightly with her handkerchief, and soft-hearted Mr. Van Dyck blew his nose unaffectedly.

Carrie, as was inevitable, broke the charm:

“The very loveliest ballad I ever listened to!” she cried ecstatically “Is that all?”

“All I know of it!” smiled Lang. “I learned it by ear, ages ago. My sister used to sing it.”

Will Corlaer put an unexpected question:

“What is a mavis?”

Nobody had an answer until Norman Lang said—again with his pleasant laugh—“I have always supposed it was a lark. What other bird sings a love-song to the morn?”

Sarah spoke timidly—“Don't you recollect, Mr. Lang, that Mr. Peggotty says in ‘David Copperfield’—‘Like two young mavishes,’ and David explains that ‘it was Norfolk dialect for thrushes?’ I heard a thrush singing in the cherry-tree this very morning, and I thought of the ‘mavis’ and ‘Mary of Argyle.’”

“The idea of your knowing something the school-master doesn't!” The farmer's pride in her broke bounds.

“I should not have known anything about the bird if Mr. Lang hadn't read ‘David Copperfield’ aloud to us last winter.”

The farmer's broad face outbeamed the moon:

“She *is* a pretty clever girl in some things! I hear,

Child, that your book-mark took the prize to-day. I s'pose you will say that you wouldn't have chosen the motto out of the hymn-book if the teacher hadn't showed it to you?"

"I knew the hymn," the girl answered readily, but with becoming diffidence. "I certainly should not have thought of using it in connection with the cross and the cup. I cannot recollect when I did not know what *they* stand for. I never thought of the meaning they have now that the motto is above them. How *could* I?"

She sat erect; her eyes shone in the moonlight with unshed tears. She was looking past her father and the rest of them into the sky; her voice was low, and thrilling.

"How *could* I?" she repeated slowly. "I have never had any sorrow!"

For perhaps thirty seconds nobody spoke. Then the farmer stretched his hand toward her with a muffled exclamation—"That's God's truth, child! I wish your old father could only keep you from *ever* having any!"

"Maybe it wouldn't be good for me, dear father! But"—turning towards the others—"we won't talk about mournful things to-night when everything is so beautiful! Did mother tell you of the present the Ladies' Aid is to make Mrs. Corlaer? The most curious thing you ever saw!"

"Never had a sorrow!" In years to come, more than one of those strangely moved by the confession, would recall it and the weird beauty of the hour and scene.

Margarita brought it up during the walk home. Her companion was not talkative, and she had opportunity to discourse at will:

"It sent shivers all through me, Mr. Lang, when she said it! It sounded like tempting Providence. So few can tell the same story. In looking back, I see crosses

planted all along my path, and I am not much older than Sarah Van Dyck. Happy, happy girl! But have you ever heard that when Sorrow does come to those who have not been bereaved for a long time, it seems to be the signal for a troop of trouble?"

"It would seem to be a natural law,—" began Norman Lang, when Will's voice struck across the speech. He was walking a few yards behind them, with Carrie, but his tones carried far in the dead stillness of the late evening. Tone and language were so unlike his, that the two in front stopped talking:

"All I have to say is—'*Wo unto him by whom the offence cometh!*' "

CHAPTER XI

WILHELMUS CORLAER was known to be too much a “man of affairs” to be uniformly cheerful, although too thoroughly the gentleman to be morose to friend and neighbour. But his associates in business and those who were in the way of meeting him casually, had not failed to remark upon the change in his face and manner during the past six months. He had lost flesh; his weary eyes and the deepened furrows in cheek and brow added ten years to his apparent age.

The bovine imagination, rising to the occasion, launched into flights of invention that would have won a smile from the haggard man who was their inspiration. Streamlets of conjecture and drops of so-called information, linking Carrie’s name with that of the ne’er-do-well who had once more mysteriously disappeared from the places that once knew him, played a considerable part in the theories broached upon the Store steps on warm evenings, and over the counter on rainy days. Financial embarrassments naturally loomed large upon the horizon for awhile, exorcised in time, by the sure and certain evidence of his increasing prosperity. A growing belief in a hypothesis introduced by our friend, Mr. Van Dyck, at length put the rest out of commission. The worthy farmer-miller recollects with distinctness that two of the Corlaers—one an uncle, the other a first cousin of the present Patroon (by courtesy)—had died of Enlargement of the Spleen. The sallow complexion, loss of

appetite and melancholy mien of the case they were diagnosing, "corresponding to a 't' with the symptoms of the dread malady that had carried them off the stage of earthly existence."

The phrases were Mr. Van Dyck's own, and fell with tremendous effect upon the various audiences for whom they were formulated. Norman Lang had not vexed his brain to offer refutation or assent before the June day when Mr. Corlaer reined up his horse as they met upon the turnpike near his own house, and put a direct question:

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Lang. Can you spare me an hour of your valuable time to-morrow forenoon? As it will be Saturday, you are likely to be at liberty, I suppose? I wish to consult you upon a matter of some importance to me."

The young man, albeit startled by the request, replied politely that he would be glad to call at any hour Mr. Corlaer might appoint.

"At ten o'clock, then, if that will be convenient to you?" was the next sentence. "And at my office?"

He went into no explanation, and beyond a brief—"Thank you! Then I shall expect you at ten o'clock!" when the other had expressed his assent to the terms of time and place, not another word was spoken. The mettled horse bounded down the road at the prick of the spur, and Lang pursued his way homeward, lost in a fog of amaze and speculation. What possible use could the rich Ironmaster have for him—a student and a schoolmaster? Their lines of thought and enterprise, and their ambitions were so diverse, the one from the other, he could conceive of no common interest that could unite them.

He was no nearer a solution of the puzzle when he pre-

sented himself five minutes before ten at the door of Mr. Corlaer's private office.

He had walked fast and lingered upon the steps to recover breath.

The office, a modest frame building one story high, was a stone's throw from the bridge spanning the swift current escaping from the imprisoned lake thirty feet above. A huge rock in the centre of the stream had been utilised, nearly a century before, as a foundation for the dam. At the left, as the observer stood, towered the rude masonry of the power-house from which sluices of water turned the machinery of the foundry upon the lower level. The shout of the cataract and the continuous roar of the mills were in one and the same key. Fast upon the heels of the thought followed a flippant speech of Carrie Corlaer's, uttered teasingly for her father's benefit:

"Father is very proud of our picturesque waterfall, and there's no denying that it is rather pretty when the pond is full and the Works are not pulling too hard upon it. But if there comes a drought, or if the mills are running day and night, it looks like nothing so much as a rock in a violent perspiration!"

Norman Lang smiled at the recollection in turning to knock at the door.

It was opened by Mr. Corlaer in person. The visitor was ushered through a narrow entry into a room of fair dimensions fitted up as an office and library. Two sides were lined with bookcases filled with leather-bound volumes of portentous size, and bearing the marks of much usage. Some had the unmistakable commercial stamp. Others, the quick eye of the book-lover recognized as standard classics in Latin and English. A large desk was in the middle of the floor, and two chairs were set at a conversational angle conveniently near it. By the

time Lang had accepted one of these, facing his companion, the latter entered upon the business that had brought them together.

"I understand from something my daughter Margarita has said, Mr. Lang, that you have had some experience in a Government Assay office?"

"Comparatively little, sir. I worked in one for three months, a year ago. Chemistry has always been an attractive study to me, and Metallurgy. It was, therefore, very agreeable to me when a friend who is a Government official, offered me a position as the substitute of a regular employé in the office of an assayer who was sent abroad on business. I enjoyed the work, and tried to make good use of my time."

"I am sure of it. Your casual mention of the circumstances to my daughter seemed to me providential. I do not think I am superstitious. I do believe devoutly in an overruling Providence that directs what we are inclined to misname 'trivial' matters, as truly as it ordains great events. I should lack courage to keep on living if I were to lose this faith. I was in great perplexity—at my wits' end, I may say—when my daughter dropped the observation I have quoted. I may be mistaken in thinking you may be the man I am looking for. I have a strong conviction that I am on the right track."

This was the amazing preamble to a narration which held the listener spellbound for the next hour.

The man whom his world accounted successful had cherished, for a score of years, an unsatisfied ambition. Avoiding the scientific and technical terms in which he laid the story before his chosen confidant, it is enough to say briefly that he had long been discontented with the methods and results of carrying on the manufactures committed to him by his father. The ore he was now

raising from the mountain-mines was superior in certain values to any that had yet rewarded his enterprises, and promised to lend itself to his darling project of making a finer quality of steel than had ever been put upon the American market.

He had made a close study of foreign steels, and believed that he might bring his metal to the like perfection. He quickened his hearer's respectful admiration to enthusiasm by the display of erudition heretofore unsuspected by the young man. Not one stage in the history of the metal which was his hobby had been overlooked by him. In speaking of Damascus steel he waxed eloquent. He held and believed for certain that steel was used in building the pyramids; he was, if possible, more positive in his conviction as to the Hindu process of fusing iron with carbon into what stupid translators had written down as "wootz"—an older manufacture, perhaps, than that practised by the early Egyptians. In Russia, there was now in operation a secret process which was producing the finest quality of steel the modern world had ever seen. Again and again he had believed himself upon the threshold of a discovery that would enable him to vie with this. He had spent thousands of dollars in futile experiments. He had studied chemistry to this end; he had employed chemists and assayers to work under his direction—again and again, to fall just short of perfection—the perfection he knew was yet attainable.

"I am putting myself unreservedly into your power, Mr. Lang," was the conclusion of the marvellous confession. "Every man has a pet ambition—a desire which dominates every other. You may think mine ignoble. It is my one overmastering longing. If you will work with me for the next three months, I am san-

guine that I shall come nearer to the goal than ever before."

He added that he had conducted his experiments in a private laboratory in the wing of his house, known as his private office. It was fully equipped with furnace, crucibles, blow-pipes and all the paraphernalia of the chemist's trade. He did not ask for an immediate answer to what Mr. Lang might regard as the dream of a monomaniac. He did invite him to go with him to his laboratory, and inspect the machinery there prepared for the furtherance of his design. Then he might take his time for deliberation.

Receiving Norman's affirmative reply, he asked him to wait a few minutes until he could give some orders at the mill, and left him to ruminate upon the revelation to which he had hearkened.

For revelation it was, and one that wrought awe, as well as surprise, in the auditor. It was as if he had looked into the uncovered depths of a human soul; listened to the panting of a passion that possessed the entire nature of a man he, with the public at large, thought reasonable and self-contained far beyond the average of his kind. In a dreamy way—more like the gropings of a stunned mind than calm reasoning—Norman recalled something he had once heard said of another master of men:

"He seems calm. It is Hecla, covered with snow and ice!"

The ice-coating had been riven and he had drawn back, almost affrighted, at the seething lava beneath.

"And he really believes he was providentially directed to engage me to help bring his dream to pass!" he murmured aloud, dazed and fascinated. The still room gave back the echo made faint by the steady boom of cataract and mills. He bethought himself, now, that the accom-

paniment had been a ceaseless hum while the strange story went on. In years to come, the memory would recur to him, unexpectedly, when the weird harmony filled his ears. And associated with it would ever be the thought of the uncovered volcano.

He got up impatiently and walked to the window. He must think of commonplace things—things that really *were*—not the stuff dreams of power and wealth are made of.

The afternoon sun turned the dancing torrent to gold and silver, and painted rainbow hues upon the spray. Beyond and above spread the ineffable blue of June skies. At the right of the fall a grove of giant hemlocks stretched back over the hills. Still, as in a dream, he recollected that he had strolled up the road leading through the heart of the wood last Sunday afternoon, just before sunset, with Sarah Van Dyck, and stopped to hear the thrushes trill responsive love-notes to one another in the green depths.

“It is like being in church!” Sarah had whispered, and he thought as he often had thought before, what a pure, poetic fancy the child had.

Disjointed musings, all of them—to be dismissed hurriedly as Mr. Corlaer emerged from the door of the opposite building and crossed the road toward him.

On Monday morning the Ironmaster had his answer. Norman Lang would enter his employ as soon as he closed the school. Vacation would begin in one week from that memorable Saturday.

Thus was brought to pass the arrangement announced by Margarita to Sarah in their cosy chat by the window overlooking the mill on the afternoon of the last meeting of the Ladies’ Aid before the Festival.

It was the busiest time of the year with farmers and

farmers' wives. The heat of the weather may have combined with this circumstance in abating the stir and buzz and hum of gossip inevitable upon the establishment of new, and, to the mind of the neighbourhood, extraordinary relations between the two men. Had explanations been withheld, the breeze would not have died away so soon, and left so little dust and débris to be cleared up.

Mr. Corlaer's "fad"—(they called it plain "craze" then)—for Chemistry and such like occult sciences was an old story in the community, and what more natural than that the energetic schoolmaster should be willing to turn several honest dollars instead of loafing through the vacation? He made no secret of his acquiescence in all this. He had done office-work in other vacations, and considered himself fortunate to be settled in a spacious wing of the homestead, where the front windows gave upon the shaded lawn, and the back, near which stood his desk, looked across the garden to the benignant swell of the mountain-range behind which the sun sank in golden pomp at evening.

It was inevitable that the assistant should gradually glide into intimacy with the Corlaer family. At the farmhouse it ceased to be a matter of remark when Mr. Lang did not appear at the one o'clock dinner. He was detained in the laboratory by Mr. Corlaer's irregular appearances, on account of engagements at the mills, or at the forge "up the mountain." For awhile, motherly Mrs. Van Dyck pleased herself by putting aside choice tid-bits for her lodger's supper, and, when his appetite was inadequate to the full enjoyment of the treat, pitied him for working so hard that he was "just clean tired out." When she learned that Mrs. Corlaer insisted upon his dining with her household when he was thus detained,

the good dame's solicitude subsided into satisfaction that he was "thought so much of."

She enlarged upon the theme one sultry afternoon, as she sat upon the porch in the friendly shade of the cherry-tree, awaiting the homing of her "men folks." That was the generic term for the masculine portion of every family in northern New Jersey. Sarah sat upon the upper step of the porch, hands folded in her lap, her white gown falling in billowy folds about her feet. The sanguine dyes of the west were reflected in palest and purest pink from a few cumulus clouds afloat above the eastern horizon, and the girl's uplifted face caught the flush. She was the apple of her mother's eye, as she was of her father's. Neither would have surveyed her with the worshipful gaze bent upon her now from the semi-obscurity of the hall. Saucy, in clean purple calico, as glossy and stiff as calendered cardboard, was taking her ease after her own fashion, upon a broad wooden stool, low enough to allow her to draw her knees to the level of the chin supported by her cupped hands. That she was there at all, and in a fresh clean gown, was proof positive that supper was, in Mrs. Van Dyck's vernacular, "good and ready," the hot biscuit wrapped in a napkin; the pork and beans waiting in the open oven; the big platter of "salmagundi," covered from the flies, set before the master's place, and the tea drawing with all its might upon the hob.

Not until the men-folks were actually inside of the house and washing off the day's grime at the sink in the back-kitchen, would the great pitchers of sweet- and butter-milk be brought from the cellar.

"The churning turned out splendid to-day," the contented dame broke the sunset-silence to say. "Not that it was likely to do any other way. For, if I do say it

what shouldn't, my butter has never failed to come for forty years. I've no manner of patience with these slack-twisted women who are everlastin'ly whinin' about 'poor luck' with their milk. To my way of thinkin', there's no such thing as luck! When things go wrong somebody is to blame—every time! If we do right, everything will come out right. We have the Scripture for that! 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' What would we think of father if he was to plant ragweed and expect rye to come up?"

Sarah gave her pleasant little laugh.

"You have a comical way of putting things, mother! But you are right about the seed—and I suppose about the churning. Only—I feel sorry for people who go wrong—maybe once or twice, and then are punished for it all their lives. It doesn't seem fair! I was just thinking before you spoke of seeing Dick Walker down in the village to-day."

"You don't say *he's out!* Yet I might have known, if I had stopped to think, that he must have served his year. And he has the face to show himself 'round here among honest folks!"

"Where else could he go, mother?" Sarah put in quietly and sadly. "He has no home except his mother's house. Mr. Lang says it was so wrong as to be almost a crime to trust a boy of nineteen to handle the mail. Mr. Schenck had no right to take the place of postmaster unless he meant to discharge the duties of the postoffice. Mr. Lang says *he* was the one to be prosecuted, not the boy he allowed to open the mails, and all that. The Walkers are terribly poor——"

"And are likely to stay poor all their days!" interjected the notable matron.

"That isn't Dick's fault, mother. He loves his mother

dearly. She fell sick and there wasn't a cent in the house, and when he sorted the mail, one day, out fell a letter that he could feel had money in it, and the temptation was too much for him. Mr. Lang was talking about it to the Dominie last night after the singing-class. I had to see Mrs. de Baun about the library-books, and I could hear what the gentlemen were saying. They were of one mind. The Dominie is trying to get something for Dick to do. His mother has worked herself almost to death, while he was away. Mrs. de Baun is going to bring the case before the Ladies' Aid. She can sew beautifully. I was thinking, mother, that we might give her work once in a while?"

She said it timidly—why, was quickly seen.

"Sarah Van Dyck! I am surprised at you! Do you think for a minute that I would have the mother of a jail-bird hangin' around my house? If she didn't bring up her son to be honest and keep himself straight, she will have to take the consequences. There comes the Scripture again! She has made her bed and she must lie in it! It's law and gospel!"

"They don't always say the same thing!" murmured the daughter, without turning her eyes from the fading clouds.

"You don't know what you are talking about, child! I'm real glad Will Corlaer is not here to hear you. He's that strict and upright in his notions he'd think it real odd in you—raised as you have been. As for your father, he'd be right down scandalised. I'm sorry for Patsey Walker, but the sins of the children are visited upon parents as certain as the other way. They *do* say that Mr. Corlaer has done lots for her while her son was in jail. He's a good man—is Mr. Corlaer—but there is such a thing as bein' *too* charitable!"

Saucy's cavernous eyes released their hold upon her idol's face. Unobserved by the speakers, she had glowered out of the dark corner, lurking like a watchdog, intent upon the fluctuations of her darling's countenance. Without taking in the trend of the dialogue, she perceived that it made the girl unhappy, and resented it as a dog might spring at one who struck his master.

The sight of the figure crossing the bridge brought her forward. She leaned over to touch her sister-in-law's shoulder.

"Coming! Ice! Buttermilk!"

She disappeared.

"It's so funny!" chuckled the hostess as Norman Lang ran fleetly up the winding path and stood before her. "Saucy rushed off the minute she spied you, to get the ice for your buttermilk. She never forgets that you won't drink tea when you can get my fresh buttermilk. And there come the rest of our men-folks! It's time I was goin' in!"

CHAPTER XII

DENIZENS of the Kinapeg Valley were wont to declare stoutly that they had a patent for the clearest moonlight in the United States. They "didn't pretend to account for it. They only knew it was *so!*!" And when a Jersey man with Dutch blood in his veins said a thing was "*so!*" all Christendom could not make him budge a hair's breadth from his fortified opinion.

Edward de Baun was a native of New York State, but long residence in the adjacent smaller commonwealth had won him over to many provincial beliefs.

On the August night of which our last chapter bore the date, he was driving leisurely behind his well-fed and well-groomed roadster on the highway leading by easy degrees to the Van Dyck homestead.

A breeze, weak and tentative, but betokening in quality its mountain birth, had stolen down to the valley at sunset.

"And makes existence more than tolerable," observed the Dominie, with rising approval. "It almost matches the moon."

Silver-clear, she was smiling upon them from the wooded heights on their right. Hemlocks and pines were redolent of garnered perfume.

"A fellow doesn't mind the longest way 'round when he travels it on a night like this, and in company with his best girl," quoth the well-trained husband of years, as

they crossed the bridge spanning the narrowest part of the lake.

Then, like the true-hearted gentleman he was, he punctuated the speech with a kiss.

“Good evenin’, Dominie!” said a familiar voice, and Case Van Dyck strolled around the end of the railing where the road turned sharply into one following the bank of the lake.

“Havin’ a good time—ain’t you?”

His chuckle was nearly a guffaw, and his companion gave a little scream.

“Good evening, Case!” was the undismayed response. “Even Jersey law has nothing to say against a man’s making love to his own wife!”

He drove on.

His wife clutched his arm.

“Ed, dear! how could you? Did you see *who* that was with him?”

“Of course I did! It would have served him right if I had laid my whip across his shoulders. If Jo Scheffelin can’t stay sober long enough to keep his wife at home, somebody ought to interfere to save that young fool from disgracing his family. Those three boys have no brains to spare, but respect for their parents should make one of them ashamed of carrying on with a creature like that. She hasn’t a rag of reputation to her name! And that poor mother, pluming herself upon the superlative excellence of everything belonging to her!”

“Don’t you suppose she guesses what is going on? Some busybody *must* have told her!”

“Not a bit of it! Who would dare! And if every man, woman and child in the state were to make affidavit to the truth of the story, she could not be made to be-

lieve that one of the boys, raised by her and 'Father,' could go wrong. She is as blind as a mole where they are concerned. And if she is a mole, *he* is a bat—a blundering, pompous bat!"

"Don't take it out upon poor old Frank!" his wife remonstrated as the whip got into play. "He, at least, isn't leading a double life!"

Her liege lord was not to be diverted from his sombre musings.

"It is beyond my comprehension how these things come about! I see more than one family in my congregation—I might say more than half-a-dozen—that have been, as they would say, 'religiously brought up.' Yet, as soon as they arrive at what we fools and blockheads call 'years of discretion,' they depart from the way in which they should go—Solomon to the contrary notwithstanding"—as old Professor Wyckoff used to say."

He grew grave again. "Sometimes I think that one of the most arrant humbugs ever foisted upon a credulous race is the figment that crime takes naturally to the city, and does not flourish in the country. Yet—" he reined in his horse and pointed with his whip to the moon-bathed hills asleep against the horizon—"would not common sense and enlightened reason say that life amid scenes like these must be elevating to one's better nature? Is the sublime thought of 'looking through Nature up to Nature's God' but a poet's dream? Worse still, is the preaching of the gospel of purity of life and noble thinking a dead letter in our day? Look at this region, for example. The godly forefathers of these people established three churches of our denomination within a radius of six miles. One antedates the Revolution by twenty years and more. Another was standing when Washington chased Howe from the Valley. The third—

'my church,' as I love to think of it—has the best congregation of them all in numbers and in the quality of the membership. It is spoken of in Classis as 'a Model Parish.' God knows—and He alone—how hard I have tried to declare the 'whole counsel of God' committed to my unworthy self. I might say too, with shame and confusion of face, that He alone knows how I have failed!—how I have *failed!*"

His voice broke. A silent, slow shake of the head completed the confession.

"Darling Husband! I cannot let you slander yourself so cruelly! This is sheer morbidness! Dear! *God knows!* You often say there is more comfort and strength in those two words than in a whole volume of men's teaching."

"There is! Blessed be His Holy Name! But, dear wife, when I see the tares growing faster than the wheat in the field He has called me to cultivate, what am I to think? What is wrong in my preaching and teaching? The Gospel and Morality should be inseparable. We are not backward in warning our young people to flee from the wrath to come. After they are in the church, do we follow them up—as, for example, Paul admonished his converts? Have you ever noticed what emphasis he lays—and continually—upon pure words, pure thoughts and right behaviour? After Timothy, Paul's dearly beloved son in the faith, was bishop of Ephesus, he is exhorted to 'flee from youthful lusts,' and reminded that a man who would be a vessel of honour in the Master's house should 'purge himself' from lying, perjury, men-stealing, and all manner of sins 'against his fellows and his own body.'

He was silent for a long minute. Then, words came slowly and hard.

“I wonder, sometimes—I ask myself, upon the knees of my heart—if we who are accounted ‘educated preachers,’ do not talk too much of creeds and the needs of conversion and repentance, to the neglect of everyday, practical religion. That young fool back there is not a church-member, although his father thinks he ‘must come out on the Lord’s side, before long, being a child of the Covenant.’ The Elder can reel off Scripture by the yard. I never heard him balk at a text, or a Promise, in private life, or in prayer-meeting. His son is one of my fold. What Paul would do, were he in my shoes, would be to turn this horse and carriage about; drive after the guilty couple and collar him—snatch him like a brand from the burning—and tell the ugly truth to both of them.”

“My dear boy, it would set the whole family against you! You can’t convert a sinner by knocking him down. This is not St. Paul’s day. Different times, different manners!”

“And different morals?” queried the husband grimly. “But you are a wise adviser. The same counsel has been ringing in my ears for days—ever since I have known for certain what is going on under my eyes and the turned-up noses of a Christian community. Here we are!” checking his horse at the gate ending the crooked path opposite the mill. “Forget how cranky I have been, and help me play the hypocrite for an hour.”

It was a hasty whisper, for Mr. Van Dyck was hurrying down the road to meet them.

“I’ll hitch him, Dominie!” taking the tie-rein from the pastor’s hold. “You give Mrs. de Baun your arm up the Hill Difficulty. THAT’s what Mr. Lang calls it on hot days!” was his wheezing salutation.

He, Mrs. Van Dyck and Sauchy were in the summer retreat under the arching cherry-tree. The sitting-

room windows were wide open and the sound of music flowed through them.

The de Bauns should have been too well-used to Sauchy's eccentric ways to be amazed when, as the brilliant prelude rippling under Sarah's fingers was succeeded by her voice, the aunt mounted upon the bench on which she had been sitting, and peered into the window. There she remained, apparently as flat against the white wall of the house as if pasted upon it. Her purple calico was black in the dense shadow.

Mrs. Van Dyck apologised in an undertone:

"She's fair daft on music—and crazy about Sarah's singing. As soon as they're through this one piece, I must let them know you're here. They'd never forgive me if I didn't."

The minister and his wife were listening in good earnest to the ballad, sung as a duet.

"One of my favourites!" breathed the lady; "I have not heard it for a long time."

Our grandaunts revelled in Mrs. Hemans's poetry and made it fashionable when it was set to music. All her ballads were sentimental. Some were religious. "The Messenger Bird" was both sentimental and religious. We, of a more enlightened age, concede patronisingly that the "thin vein of poetry running through Felicia Hemans's rhymes is sometimes exquisite in pathos and tender feeling," yet two women wept, and one man sat with head bowed and fingers interlocked in reverent attention, while the blended voices upraised the strain:

"Thou art come from the Spirit-land, thou bird!

Thou art come from the Spirit-land!

Through the dark pine-grove let thy voice be heard
And tell of the shadowy band.

We know that thy bowers are green and fair
In the light of that summer shore,
And we know that the friends we have lost are there,
They are there, and they weep no more.

“But tell us—but tell us, thou bird of the solemn strain!
Can those who have loved forget?
We call and they answer not again;
O, say, do they love us yet?
We call them far through the silent night
And they speak not from cave or hill.
We know, thou bird, that their home is bright,
But say—do they love us still?”

Only the cry of a smitten heart that found the way to the *sanctum sanctorum* of other yearning hearts, and lingered there for all time!

Music-teachers in the early fifties were punctilious as to the enunciation of the words of songs learned by the pupil. Sarah Van Dyck was a docile and apt learner. Under the tuition of her singing-master she had acquired, not merely the art of expression of the composer’s meaning, but a certain sympathetic quality, that was pure in tone and marvellously sweet.

The Dominie brought his hands together in noiseless applause when the song was done; his wife was not ashamed to wipe her eyes dry, and Mrs. Van Dyck snivelled unreservedly.

“Often as I hear it, I can’t help cryin’, no matter who sees it!” she quavered. “It seems to go so far down—somehow! Sarah, daughter! here’s the Dominie and Mrs. de Baun! Come out and see them!”

All this time the flat figure against the wall had not

stirred. Now the head was thrust further through the window and a raucous summons shot into the room:

“Baby! Dominie! Dominie Isha!”

Norman Lang started violently and looked around:

“Did you know she was there all the time?”

“I didn’t think anything about it,” laughed Sarah, shutting the piano. “I might have known it, though! She is very fond of that song, and she likes to hear me sing.”

Deliberately raising the candle that had shed just enough light for the performers to follow the familiar lines of the music, Norman flashed it full upon the face supported by the chin upon the sill of the window. The wide, deeply-sunken eyes did not blink; the head was immobile. Norman’s audible shudder was not all affectation.

“Ugh! It is ‘spooky’ to find her boring holes in a fellow’s back with those big eyes, when he is off-guard!”

The watcher was nowhere to be seen when the young people joined the party without. Sarah spread a shawl upon the turf close to Mrs. de Baun’s chair, disposing herself in one of the kittenish attitudes that became her rarely. The white moonlight showed the smile with which she looked up at her friend’s praise of her singing.

“We do things best that we like to do,” she responded in her child-like way. “And I love ‘The Messenger Bird?’ I wish I could believe that there *is* one! In my copy of Mrs. Hemans a footnote says there is a superstition in some country—India, I think—which tells of a bird that brings messages from the Other World. I wish it were true! It is lovely to think it *might* be!”

Her sigh was sincere, and to Mrs. de Baun, pathetic. She was very fond of the girl. “A candle in the wrong socket,” she had described Sarah to her husband, that

very day. "She will probably marry Will Corlaer and be suffocated by Margarita, and frozen by Mr. Corlaer for the rest of her life. The intellectual part of her would be dwarfed in her home but for the little Mr. Lang can do to develop it. She has improved marvelously through his influence. But she is the pet of the family—and she won't be if she marries out of her rank. 'Rank' is not just the word on this side of the ocean," puckering her brows perplexedly. "Yet *that* is what she will do! Thackeray puts the right word into George Warrington's mouth. You recollect where he says to his friend—'Beware, Pen, how you marry out of your degree!' 'Degree?' that is it, exactly! And *that* is what Mrs. Van Dyck's daughter will do when she becomes Will Corlaer's wife!"

"Which she is quite sure to be before long," was the reply. "Mrs. Van Dyck told me in so many words, the other day, that 'Sarah is as good as engaged to Will Corlaer.' She hedged a little by saying that 'of course we don't want it spoken of, except to such friends as you and Mrs. de Baun.'"

"My poor child!" the wife had said, feelingly.

She reiterated it inly, to-night, her fingers stroking the hand that closed fondly upon them. The child had been brought up too delicately for her station. But she would not fit easily into that held for generations by the Corlaers.

It was a pity Norman Lang was so evidently her teacher, and nothing more! He could take her away from the fussy mother, the boastful father, the bovine brothers—the *impossible* aunt whose namesake she was—

The mental matchmaking was suspended by hearing her husband ask the farmer:

"Where are all the boys this evening?"

"O, rambling around the village, I suppose—or visiting the girls. 'Promiscuously'—as one might say. 'Seems to me, young folks must find it duller'n ditch-water in summer. It's too hot to stop in-doors and there's nothin' amusin' goin' on there, if they do. Young blood wants to be on the go. My! but I've seen colts what had been in harness for ten hours, roll in the grass and kick up their heels and whinney the minute the straps were undone 'nd the bridle taken out of their mouths. It's natural! that's what it is! So, Mother and I never interfere with the boys' comin's and goin's. Start 'em right and then give 'em their heads! say I. Not but what I wish some of them—or all three—would keep steady company with nice girls and settle down in the *mattermonial* yoke. I was married before I was twenty-one and we hain't never been sorry for it once since, hey, old lady?" making a long arm to poke her in the ribs with his emptied pipe.

"Speak for yourself!" parrying the thrust, and, as is the manner of contented wives, refusing to meet him halfway. "Not that I'm complainin'. We all have our ups and downs, or we wouldn't ever want to go to heaven. But, as Father was sayin', the only amusement young folks in the country have at any season of the year is courtin'! 'Seems-if they was driven to it for the want of some variety in their work-a-day life."

"Rather an agreeable amusement—isn't it?" said Lang, good-humouredly.

"That depends upon several conditions!" It was the Dominie who took up the word at this point. "Sometimes it is about the worst business two people can be engaged in." He went on as brusquely. "I was talking

to my wife this very evening of what Mr. Van Dyck has brought forward so strongly—the sameness of country-life for our young men and women. The only library we have is locked up in the Sunday School-room all the week, and is composed almost entirely of religious books. If we had some kind of common centre—a meeting-place where young people could play games, read the papers and become acquainted with one another under the friendly care of a committee of ladies, who would, say, once or twice a week, provide simple refreshments for them,—I believe we should have a more orderly and a happier community. We might get up a debating-society once a month in which we older fellows could take a hand. Mr. Lang! get your brains to work upon the skeleton I have given you. And when you have digested the scheme (it is hardly that yet!) come to the Parsonage and talk it over with me.”

Before the stunned Van Dycks could catch their breath, he was off upon another tack:

“One object of my visit this evening, Mr. Van Dyck, was to enlist your sympathies in behalf of that unfortunate boy, Dick Walker. It is for us to make a decent, God-fearing citizen of him, or to let him sink into viler depths than those from which he has just emerged. This poor lad has been in *hell* for a year! We owe a duty to him and to ourselves to bring him back to himself. I want you and other Christian men to hold out a helping hand to him. Give him a chance, my dear friend! Haven’t you farm-work, or a job in the mill? If *you* stand by him, the example will be followed by others. He is at work now in the Parsonage-garden, but he ought to have regular employment. It is the only hope of keeping him straight.”

Mrs. Van Dyck’s mind moved more quickly than her

husband's, and she found her tongue while he was casting about for suitable periods:

"*Why, Dominie de Baun!* I can't think you are in earnest! There is such a thing as carryin' charity that thinks no evil too far. I know you mean to do the right thing by the fellow, but it scares me to think what will be said when people see a jail-bird at work in the Parsonage garden. I'm afraid there will be an awful scandal about it. I do hope and pray that Rebecca Jane will keep the doors locked while you are out, and that she took the silver upstairs. I shouldn't sleep a wink for a week if that rascal had such an opportunity to know where *I* keep my silver and jewelry.

"It's more'n likely that he seen you comin' through the village, and knows there's nobody in the house to take care of it and those blessed children but one widow-woman what ain't strong, and one slip of a girl. I declare—" her imagination warming to its work—"it makes my blood run cold to think what might be happenin' at this very minute! A hardened criminal like that wouldn't stop at stealin' all he could lay his hands upon. He'd do *murder's* quick-as-look, if he was interfered with!"

For the thousandth time in his eight years' pastorate, the Dominie's ineradicable sense of humour got the better of rising temper. He laughed outright, and Sarah and Mr. Lang joined in—she faintly, he with his whole heart.

"My dear Mrs. Van Dyck!" the minister contrived to ejaculate before she could rally her scattered forces. "What an imagination you have! I would back Rebecca Jane against three slim fellows like Dick Walker. I have no fear of his playing the burglar until he has had more experience. He's as thin as a rail and as bloodless as a picked chicken. Housebreaking and bloodshedding are just what we mean to save him from. His mother is

a good woman, and a hard worker. My wife hopes to induce some of the ladies in the church to find steady work for her."

"She'll get none from *me!*!" interrupted the virtuous matron—setting her teeth tight behind the thin lips that betokened shrewish tendencies. "Not but what I'm sorry for her! It must break a mother's heart to have her child disgrace her as he's done. It's no use, Dominie, to try to wash out a stain upon a fam'ly reputation. There's a text that comes up to me oftentimes when I hear folks talk about reformin' hardened sinners—'How can I bless them what God has cursed?' I was sayin' something like that to Sarah just before supper. And that brings me 'round to your ideas of keepin' young folks good and respectable by amusin' them. What *I* say—as maybe hadn't ought to say it—is that if you train up your children in the way they had ought to go—sendin' them to Sunday School and takin' them to Church o' Sunday, and evenin' meetin' in the week, and seein' they are clean and well-behaved and industrious, you have the promise that they will not depart from it when they are old and grey-headed. Think of Samuel and Jacob and Abraham and David! The promise was to them and their children. And I've heard Father say twenty times over, that the Lord doesn't change His ways with His people."

"Your husband is right, my dear lady! I believe in Covenant-promises as devoutly as you two can. But when Samuel's sons took bribes from the people, and coveted riches, God did not allow them to succeed their father as rulers of Israel. Jacob neglected his older children because he loved Joseph and Benjamin better than he loved poor Leah's boys and girl. We know what sorrow and chastisement were the consequences; Abra-

ham may have brought up Isaac in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but what about Esau, and the shameful trick goody-goody Jacob practised upon *him*? As for David—his darling Absalom would have killed his father but for his cousin Joab—and Solomon, the wisest man in his generation, has left as his epitaph—‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity?’ The children may have been what we call ‘letter-perfect.’ The teaching did not go as far down as it should have done. There was purity of doctrine all right. The duty of purity of heart and life should have gone along with it. ‘These things ye ought to have done and not left the others undone.’”

He arose and pulled out his watch, turning it to catch the silver-white light falling between the boughs.

“Ten o’clock, and after! I am ashamed of myself—and of my wife’s failure to remind me that I was preaching too long! She lets me see her watch on the sly when I get long-winded in church. I hope you will all try to forgive me?”

At the first turn in the homeward drive, he groaned:

“I have scored another failure! This is growing monotonous! monotonous!”

CHAPTER XIII

IN the farthest corner and at the left of the Parsonage garden, in the angle formed by the fence with that separating it from the grave-yard on one side, and the church-green upon the other, was an arbour overrun with a hop-vine. The pastor had built the summer-house and planted the roots of the vine in the first year of his occupancy of the manse. In dimensions it was modelled upon the famous “boudoir” in which Cowper wrote poetry and talked with his friend and neighbour, the dissenting minister.

“It will hold two chairs and a table,” wrote the owner to Lady Hesketh.

Edward de Baun had visited Olney as a college-boy, and brought away lasting memories of house and grounds, together with a slip of hardy southern-wood from a clump growing against the “boudoir” wall. Instead of the walls and glazed window of the English “summer-house,” the Parsonage arbour was filled on three sides with lattice-work. The fourth was an open arch facing the church and draped by the fast-growing vines. The two chairs were clumsily built by the amateur carpenter, and the table matched them in style. A tight roof kept off the rain, and after the first summer, screens of lush greenery secured seclusion for the occupant. He called the nook his “al fresco study.” His wife spoke of it—but to him alone—as the “confessional.”

“It is too far from the house for your confidences to

be heard by eaves-droppers," she would say. "The church is shut and empty all the week. On the other side—there is no danger of listeners!"

It was upon this other side that the Dominie had constructed a wicket gate in the fence through which he might pass in and out, unseen, from the house and street, and lose himself in the shrubbery shading family "sections" and detached tombstones. Tall trees, their trunks hoary with years, grew about the Corlaer vault. Clumps of hardy roses and althea boomed in their season, and were in rank foliage all summer long. The Holland emigrants had left to their descendants reverence for the final resting-place of family and friends.

In the Kinapeg church-yard there was hardly a mound that had not a memorial stone. In the main, the cemetery was consonant with our minister's ideas of conditions favourable to "meditations among the tombs." I may subjoin that, being a man of original thought, and deeds begotten of healthy thought, he preferred his own meditations to the sombre banalities of James Hervey of blessed memory.

He had returned from a stroll in the church-yard one September afternoon, with the text of his Sunday's sermon and a well-arranged analysis of the subject in his mind, and sat himself down in one of the weather-stained chairs with the formulated intention of doing and thinking nothing for the next half-hour. He had found that indolence, actual and absolute, usually produced in his spirit and intellect what he knew in chemistry as "a precipitate and a settlement." To facilitate the process, he lighted his pipe and pulled easily and slowly upon it.

The hop-vine concealed him from view of the few passers in the road shaded by lusty elms, yet supplied convenient peep-holes through which he could spy upon the

outer world across the intervening garden. The Brouwer mansion was diagonally opposite the Parsonage, and the first moving object to cross his field of vision was a low pony-chaise—a late acquisition of the Brouwer twins. It was drawn by a piebald pony; a small coloured foot-boy occupied the rack behind, and the sisters were upon the seat in front of him. Rhoda was driving, and her bell-like tones carried what she was saying to the watcher's ears:

“Mrs. Corlaer thinks it is getting cool enough to have chocolate instead of lemonade. She will furnish it.”

The Dominie's smile was well-pleased. The world and he were singularly at peace just now. He reckoned it as a special and memorable providence that a casual allusion in Timothy O.'s hearing to his pet project of providing for young people of both sexes counter-attractions to those the powers of darkness had laid for the unwary seeker for diversion, had brought forth fruit an hundred-fold. The self-made man had a true heart under the froth and flare of his overweening self-conceit. If, throughout all that followed his animated acquiescence in the new scheme, he aimed at further glorification of His Eminence, Mr. de Baun was too broad-minded and too much engaged in the advancement of the scheme to quibble at trifles. His coadjutor brought to bear upon it the energy and sagacity that had raised him from the dust and set him among princes of finance. With dizzying rapidity he not only demonstrated the feasibility of the project, but he pledged material support and told what shape it would take.

He owned, along with many other bits of real estate which had dropped into the market at one time or another, an old stone house standing in the very centre of the settlement now dignified as a “village.” It antedated

the Revolutionary War and it had historical associations the burghers were proud to recount to strangers. Had the preceding generation been more ambitious and imaginative, it would have taken rank with multitudinous "Headquarters" that have branded the Father of his Country as a discontented nomad, to the embryo archeologist. As it was, the building was known as the "Guard House." Oldest resident's fables were credible to the extent of accepting certain dents in the oaken flooring as marks made by Washington's body-guard in grounding their muskets, when stationed there for a month. The Guard House now belonged to Timothy O. Brouwer, and was offered, free of rent, to the as-yet nameless organization to-be. The lower story (it had but one-and-a-half) consisted of a large room and a lean-to. Inside of a fortnight the resolute benefactor of his kind had the place cleaned thoroughly, replastered and kalsomined; the leaks in the roof mended, the windows glazed, and the floor relaid, the musket-dents downward. The next week the Guard House, still minus a new name—was formally opened with prayer by Mr. de Baun, and a supper was served for all who would come. It was decently furnished with tables and chairs donated by different friends of the movement; a few pictures, neatly framed,—three from Rhoda Brouwer's pencil and brush—were hung, and a supply of crockery and napery—the latter the gift of Mrs. Corlaer, and hemmed by the Ladies' Aid—was in the old cupboards built in the wall. Young people brought games—dominoes, checkers, jack-straws, battledores and shuttlecock, grace-sticks and hoops, and the Dominie secured through city friends yearly subscriptions to *Godey's Lady Book*, *The New York Tribune* and *The Christian Intelligencer*.

Finally—(and can we doubt that record of the Chris-

tian act was made in heaven?) through the powerful influence of Mrs. Corlaer—braced by her husband and doughty Timothy O. Brouwer—Mrs. Walker, whose lowly cottage was close beside the Guard House, was installed as care-taker and janitress. Mr. Corlaer and Timothy O. made themselves responsible for her wages.

Her son had called upon the Dominie and volunteered the pledge “never to set foot inside the door.”

He had received the ex-convict just here, the pastor reflected, his eyes watering in the reminiscence. He had laid his hand upon the shabby but clean jacket, in telling the son that he had offered himself as security for his good behaviour. “I can trust you, Dick, not to do anything to injure her. I have never forgotten—I can never forget—and you have other friends who will always remember, that it was for her that you made your—*Mistake!*”

(Dear Lord!—Thou Who art “faithful and—*just* to forgive us our sins”—grant, that, when our day of reckoning shall come, we may find in Thy Book of Remembrance some of our manifold sins written down as “mistakes!”)

Among the well-to-do parishioners who had contributed to the Guard House plenishing, the Van Dycks were conspicuous by their absence. The Elder and his stronger two-thirds had not openly opposed what the Corlaers and Brouwers set on foot and pushed forward. Neither did they discourage their daughter, when she attended two or three functions held in the transformed building. The boys sauntered in one evening, played a game of dominoes to show their proficiency in a pastime which was new to many of the crowd, drank lemonade and ate cake and lounged out, singly, in quest—the Dominie suspected and Lang knew—of less respectable company.

Despite the wet-blanket drippings, the father of the new departure had abundant cause for gratification in summing up results. In fancy, he saw a membership that would embrace every youth in the parish; the erection of a hall of noble proportions; a library and a reading-room; perhaps a gymnasium. He held to the conviction that a healthful development of bone and sinew is no mean weapon in the fight with corrupt instincts. Without guessing it, our country-parson was a quarter-century in advance of his day.

He had told Norman Lang of the reply made by a back-country farmer whom he overtook in the road one day, trying to coerce or persuade a balky horse to move on. Just as the minister reached him, the farmer stooped to scrape up a handful of loose dirt and work it into the beast's mouth.

"Why do you do that?" called the amazed spectator.

"To give him a new *idee!*" was the reply, as the victor jumped into the wagon and drove off.

Still curious to get at the genius of the trick, Mr. de Baun gave chase, shouting—"Does it always work?"

"*Sometimes it do! sometimes it don't.*"

"I never saw the man before and I don't know his name," pursued the narrator to his co-labourer. "But he gave me a text and a lesson. The first step in a reform is to give the subject a 'new idee.' That is what I am aiming at now. Sometimes—as with the Van Dyck boys—'it don't?' At least, not yet."

While he recalled the words, he heard the click of the wicket in the fence behind him and leaned forward, somewhat impatiently, to see who the intruder might be.

The shade of annoyance passed as Norman Lang stood in the archway.

"A clear case of 'silent, secret, sacred sympathy of soul!'" quoted the minister, when they had shaken hands. "You were the man in my thoughts at that very minute. I might have known that you would appear pretty soon. Sit down!" He pulled forward the second chair.

"I took a short cut through the cemetery, hoping I might find you here," said the visitor, seriously.

His face had lines his friend had never seen there before. He was pale, and there were shadows under the eyes usually well-opened and clear.

"My dear fellow! you are not well!" ejaculated the Dominie. "What is the trouble?"

"You used the right word, sir. I have come to you with a message from Mrs. Van Dyck. Case has run away with Jo Scheffelin's wife! Both have been missing four days. He went to Millville on business for his father last Friday morning. She joined him there, and neither has been seen hereabouts since."

He raised his hand to check the exclamation upon the lips of the horrified auditor:—

"Nor is that the worst of it! He carried several hundred dollars to the bank to be deposited for his father. I went to Millville this morning to make inquiry at the bank. He did not deposit a cent of it! Moreover, he presented a forged check and drew out every dollar his father had there upon deposit. His handwriting and Mr. Van Dyck's are singularly alike. We have often remarked upon the similarity. Perhaps our talk may have put the idea into his head. The cashier paid the money readily. Case was in the habit of attending to all such matters for his father."

If Edward de Baun's keen perceptive powers and analytic mind had not been jarred out of poise by the news, he must have marvelled at the symptoms of emotion in

one usually self-contained. As it was, horror and indignant pity possessed him to the exclusion of conjecture.

"The infamous rascal!" he broke forth. "You may well say 'the worst of it!' Something might be forgiven to the heat of youthful passion. Although this coarse amour is of long standing, and has not that claim to charity. The theft is out-and-out deviltry! And to steal from the most indulgent father that ever doted upon his boys! How does he bear it? Had any rumour of the connection ever reached him?"

Lang shook his head, without change in his lifeless tone and look:

"None! The blow was as sudden as it was heavy. He is completely crushed. When I broke the news to him as gently as I could, he fell back in his chair, as if shot, and did not speak or move for so long that we feared he had had a stroke of apoplexy. When he revived, he was still like one stunned. Mrs. Van Dyck was the first to meet me when I got home from Millville, and would go with me into the room where her husband was sitting. I helped her get him up to bed. Neither of the other sons was at home. After a while, Mr. Van Dyck began to cry like a hurt child, and I left them together. The tears may have saved his brain. In an hour or so, she came down and said he was asleep. Then it was that she asked me to come to you. Can you go, soon?"

"At once! It is the place where I ought to be. I will get my horse and buggy and you will go with me. We will save time. I take it you would rather not go into the house and talk to Mrs. de Baun—or to any one else?" He added the last words hastily, seeing the young man wince as at a stab. "Just sit still where you are! I shall be back in a few minutes."

Left to himself, Norman Lang dropped his head upon

the table and groaned aloud. He would have said that the events of the day, following close and hard upon one another; the necessity laid upon him of bearing the shameful tidings to the confiding parents; the sight of their grief—in short, the whole shocking affair—had not let him think coherently until now. He had walked fast, and a host of horrors had whipped him onward. There was partial respite from the scourging in the stillness and solitude of the spot. He even perceived and drank in involuntarily the spiciness of the southernwood warmed by the sun, the bitter-sweet of the hop-blooms swinging in the doorway. It is still an unsolved psychological problem how trifles too insignificant to arrest attention in calmer moments insinuate themselves upon the tortured senses in the supreme moments of life, and become indestructible elements of memories.

The Dominie forcibly denied himself the solace of confiding to his wife even an outline of the tragedy that called him away. He ran into the house for his hat and dust-coat, and told her that he was going to take Mr. Lang home, and might not be back for an hour or so. She was rocking her baby in her arms upon the front porch and kissed the father “Good-bye,” smilingly, with never a thought of aught amiss.

“But she will go over to see them to-morrow, I know,” he said to his passenger on the road. “It will be a comfort to Sarah to see her. She has a soft place in her heart for the girl. She and her brothers are as different as the children of the same mother could be, but she is fond of the boys, and she is sensitive. The disgrace will be harder upon her than upon her parents. I could thrash that hound within an inch of his life when I think of it. I have known for months something of his carrying-on. I had my suspicions when he moved his bed over

to the mill, 'because it was cooler there,' and took to sleeping there every night. His mother talked of it as a joke, and harped upon the wisdom of her plan of bringing up children in the right way, and then trusting them to do as they please. I wonder how many times I have heard her say, 'Boys will be boys, Father?' when he had a gleam of reason with regard to managing them! Ah, well, poor woman! she is punished beyond her deserts. Her failing was of the head, not the heart. She has lived in, and for her children—particularly her sons. Sarah is her father's pet. A good girl—if ever there was one!"

"She will be his greatest comfort," answered the other, more naturally than he had spoken in their talk in the summer-house. "Mrs. Van Dyck will be sorry for her husband, but more sorry for herself. Her pride will suffer terribly."

The next bend in the road brought the farmstead into view. The Dominie raised his whip to point to the abode of peace and plenty it looked to be. The spacious barns in the rear; the mill at the side; the great trees clustering about the white house; the gardens upon the lower level—all bespoke wise thrift in the owners of the demesne.

"It is enough to break one's heart to think of the misery and the *shame* brought upon it by one vicious, worthless boy! Ah, there's the keenest sting of all! One may live down anything else. And they have lived clean, honest lives for generations—and gloried in it—*gloried* in it!"

CHAPTER XIV

REBECCA JANE waited upon the supper-table that night in a state of suppressed excitement that would have amused her employers if their own thoughts had not been engrossed by the same matters that overflowed her brain. As it was, her substitution of the vinegar cruet for the cream-jug when Mr. de Baun would have dressed his peaches to his liking, and her failure to put butter upon the table, passed without verbal notice.

It was a distinct grievance to the maid-of-all-work that Mr. de Baun invited his wife to walk in the garden with him, when the meal was over and the children were snugly disposed of in bed and crib.

A pair of avid eyes followed the two in their promenade up one walk and down another, at no time coming near enough to the dining-room window for her to catch a word of the discourse, evidently of absorbing interest to narrator and listener. Disappointment waxed into exasperation when they, at last, entered the summer-house and, she could see by the intermittent flashes of the Dominie's pipe, were seated for a long conversation.

The germ-theory finds its most triumphant demonstration in the natural history of gossip. A pursuivant herald, with trumpet blowing and flag flying, could not have spread the news of the Van Dyck scandal further and faster than it had been carried from end to end of Kina-pegi township. There was no systematic, much less concerted effort to disseminate the ugly seeds. Yet they were

afloat in the air like thistle-down, as noisome and as fecund as blue-bottle flies, and found their way into every house. Rebecca Jane had not set foot outside the Parsonage grounds that day, and had had no visitors except that the Brouwers' cook had run over with Miss Ruth's compliments and a basket of peaches. She did not stay ten minutes, being in a hurry to get back to her baking. She left with her congener stuff for cogitation that lasted her far into the night-watches.

The evening was bland and in the ante-railway period in Kinapeg, mosquitoes had not invaded the valley. The "confessional" was safely secluded from chance eavesdroppers, and the budget to be unfolded was large.

A pensive star shone upon the pair above the roof of the church, and the occasional droning sweep of a bat joined in with katy-dids and the distant boom of a bull-frog from the creek. The tassels of the hop-vine were motionless in the breezeless night, and their bitter-sweet breath was lost in the incense of the warmed southern-wood. The Dominie had perceived and remarked upon the odour before lighting his pipe.

By the time he had drawn a dozen slow whiffs he subsided into sustained and calmer recitation:

"It is not strange that the mother should throw most of the blame upon the woman who, she honestly thinks, led her son astray against his will. 'He has the nicest disposition of the three,' she told me over and over. 'I had no trouble in managing him when he was a child. You could *coax* him into anything. And that's what that wicked wretch did! And they tell me it's been goin' on, nobody knows how long. Why didn't somebody tell me? It looks as if I hadn't a friend in the world.'

"'You wouldn't have believed it, Mrs. Van Dyck, if fifty people had told you,' I could not help saying. But I

had an awful qualm of conscience in recollecting that night we met them by the bridge, and our talk afterward. God forgive me if I have been an unfaithful shepherd of these lambs!"

"Cornelius Van Dyck is no lamb! He is twenty-eight years old," the sensible wife reminded him. "Go on! Where was Mr. Van Dyck while you talked to her?"

"Lying in bed with a wet cloth on his forehead. Sarah sat by him, putting fresh cloths on when the others got warm. Now and then he groaned piteously, and she would chafe his hands and pat them. Once I saw her stoop to kiss his forehead. At that he began to sob. He had succumbed utterly. Mrs. Van Dyck told me in his hearing and with much bitterness, that the loss of the money would cripple him seriously. I could see that was harder for her to forgive than stealing another man's wife. Even that she attributed to the evil influence of the woman he ran away with. She had no words at her call that were too vile for her. That is the way with mothers."

"And no wonder!" responded the mother of his son. "Tell me about Sarah! She was so engrossed with concern for her father that she said nothing of herself, you say?"

"I had no opportunity to speak with her alone. By and by, the poor father groaned out to me—'Won't you pray with us, Dominie?' and we knelt down around his bed and I prayed for him and the mother and for the erring boy. Then I thought we ought not to excite him by further talk, and came away. Mrs. Van Dyck went downstairs with me, and wanted to know if 'that Scheffelin thing couldn't be arrested for making Case steal the money and afterward receiving it.' 'Of course,' she said, 'Father wouldn't think of putting the law on his son.'

But something had ought to be done with *that*—, I won't repeat the word! It sounded odd from her mouth. But she was hardly sane—poor woman!"

"It is terrible!" mused the wife. "I am more sorry for Sarah than for any one else. The shame of it will cling to her—the one who is absolutely innocent of any part or lot in the sin. The parents spoiled the son; the woman tempted him, and he sinned. The pure, modest girl will feel the weight of the calamity most severely. Ed! do you suppose Will Corlaer will stand by her now? She has not looked like herself since he went away, a month ago. And has he ever made so long a business-trip before? It would be a genuine affliction to me if they were not to be married after all.

"He talked very frankly to me a week or so before he went to California on this trip. He had asked Sarah over and over to marry him, but they were not really engaged. She was unwilling to accept him while his parents are opposed to the engagement. He vows he will never give her up. I shall lose all respect for him if he lets this matter alter his resolution. Yet the Corlaers would be likely to object to the match now, if never before.

"Dear! dear! what a wretched complication! Where was Sauchy all this time?" returning to the main subject. "Did you see her?"

"She was getting supper as coolly as if nothing happened. I saw her through the door of the dining-room and said, 'Good evening!' The table was set for the whole family."

"She always does that! She cannot be made to understand that anybody is absent, and they let her have her way," interpolated Mrs. de Baun. "Did she show any consciousness that all was not quite as it should be?"

Do you know, dear, I have fancied sometimes that she has something like second-sight—or at least, a sixth sense? You recollect how she stopped Carrie Corlaer's elopement?"

The husband laughed, superior to the whim.

"She was as cool as a cucumber this evening. Mrs. Van Dyck, who comprehends her gibberish better than anybody else, translated what she rattled off to me. 'She is afraid Sarah is sick, and is very angry with the person—whatever it was, who made Sarah cry to-day,' the mother told me. Also, that she had been cooking pancakes for Sarah's supper, and I must stay to eat some. I shook hands with Sauchy and thanked her, but said you would expect me home.

"At that minute, Mr. Lang came down stairs. He had changed his clothes for a spruce suit that looked new, and wore a different face—even to complexion. His eyes were not quite right yet, though, and he appeared to put a force upon himself to speak cheerfully.

"I am going to impose my company upon you again, Mr. de Baun," he said in his finest manner. "I am to take supper at Mr. Corlaer's. May I have a seat in your buggy as far as his corner?"

"Whereupon Mrs. Van Dyck actually giggled feebly, and shook her finger at him.

"I guess we shan't see much of you at meals after this!" she said. "We can't expect it, but we shall miss you all the same."

"After we were in the wagon, Lang volunteered an explanation of the odd speech.

"I meant to call upon you this afternoon on my own business," he began in a formal way. "I have what are important communications to make to you as the Corlaers' pastor and, I hope—my friend. First, let me say

that I am engaged to be married to Miss Margarita Corlaer. It was to that Mrs. Van Dyck alluded. I told the family of it last night.””

The narrator was disappointed that the tidings did not amaze his wife.

“I imagined that would be the end of it!” she observed, sagaciously. “You see, while Mrs. Corlaer and Carrie were at Saratoga Springs—ostensibly for Carrie’s health,—really to give her, like your farmer with his balky horse, a ‘new idee’—Margarita had charge of the house-keeping and ran things generally to suit herself. It suited her to have Mr. Lang often to dinner and supper during the hot weather. ‘It was such a long walk to the Van Dycks’ in the heat of the day, and father sometimes worked with him in the laboratory until night,’ etcetera, etcetera. The long and the short of the matter is, my dear, that Margarita set her cap full and hard at your friend, and *got* him! She is satisfied—and so (presumably) is he!”

“My darling! you are sarcastic! What have you against the fellow? I thought you liked him? As everybody else does!”

“I have nothing ‘against him!’ He is a mighty pleasant man, and born to be popular. Ambitious, too! and he is doing a smart thing for himself in marrying Margarita Corlaer. It is a direct step in the upward climb. O, yes, Ed! you are ready to call me ill-natured and suspicious! I have seen what Margarita was up to, and I am frank in saying it. He seems supremely happy—I suppose?”

The Dominie stifled a laugh, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the table. The afterglow of the sunset let her see his bent figure, and that his head bobbed up and down in the effort to restrain his mirth.

There were few things he enjoyed more than stirring her up to the pitch of cutting criticism of the few persons she did not like or admire.

She neither liked nor admired the elder Corlaer sister, and the knowledge that her palpable manœuvres had landed the fish for which she had angled, was not easy to brook.

“On the contrary, my love, if you will let me speak as candidly as you have done, he comported himself less like a happy lover than I should have expected. He touched lightly upon the circumstance that the attachment was no sudden thing, but the natural result of recent associations that had ripened cordial friendship into a warmer feeling. He accepted my congratulations gracefully, and passed on to speak of the second important communication he had intended to make to me. He goes abroad the middle of next month, upon a somewhat extended business tour of steel-works in Great Britain and the Continent, as Mr. Corlaer’s representative. It fits in right all around, you see.”

“I se-e-e!” thoughtfully. “Does he take his bride with him?”

“No. He had thought of it, but Mr. Corlaer objected upon the ground that she would hamper his movements, and that he must often leave her alone while visiting places where a woman would not be comfortable.”

“That would wind up Miss Margarita’s plans with *éclat*. I understand now what I had surmised all along—why Margarita has been so friendly with Sarah Van Dyck this summer. For a little while I was foolish enough to hope that Sarah had one friend in Will’s camp and that his sister, having espoused his cause, might bring the others around to favour the match. Then, I began to piece bits of circumstantial evidence together, and to

form a theory which proves to be correct. Sarah—poor unsuspecting child! was the clay that lived near the rose. Margarita is as clever in her way as her father is in his. Carrie is a born fool, but she has a better heart than her sister."

That her husband was of her opinion was likely, for he said not a word for a full minute. He seldom smoked more than one pipe after supper, but his perturbed mood demanded the solace of a second, to-night. The after-glow had faded entirely from the sky behind the nearest mountain. It stretched itself to sleep along with its comrades of the range; the Dipper hung high and lustrous in the North; the pensive star they had noticed an hour ago, had sunk behind the comb of the church-roof. Katy-dids kept up their defiant rattle, aware, perhaps, that their time was short. Wiseacres had predicted frost for September twentieth—six weeks from the night on which the first katy-did had piped in the valley.

Subconsciously, the de Bauns felt the influences of the hour, but found no soothing in them. They were sincerely attached to their afflicted parishioners. The elder members of the family had done countless kindnesses to them in times gone by; so far as in him lay, the father had held up the pastor's hands, and the boys had belonged to the Sunday School until, as their mother phrased it indulgently—"they got too big for it." The three were of very common clay, so coarse in texture and so friable that it would not take polish.

That was patent to all who knew them. Even constant intercourse with a man of Norman Lang's type had wrought no decided improvement in their manners and habits. The Dominie had referred to them as lambs of the flock. His wife wrote them down as goats.

"The moral effect of exposed vice upon the community

is always pernicious," Mr. de Baun brought out at length. "The very knowledge that such abominations exist is demoralising. He was a judge of human nature who said of vice that—

"‘Grown familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.’

"There is a contagion in the process all the way through. Scandal breeds scandal. Heaven only knows what will be the end of this!"

His sigh was a groan, and the comforter awoke in the woman beside him. She put out tender arms and drew his head to her shoulder.

"God always gives us light enough to see the next step!" she said, softly. "I read that in one of Miss Warner's books the other day. I think that it was in 'My Brother's Keeper.' As my sister's keeper, I shall go to see Mrs. Van Dyck and my poor Sarah to-morrow morning. That is *my* next step."

CHAPTER XV

AND you are going alone, ma'am?" interrogated Rebecca Jane, as her (nominal) mistress made herself ready for the drive.

"Yes, Mr. de Baun is very busy to-day. Besides, he called yesterday upon Mrs. Van Dyck. I am going there."

The maid had already let the lady know that she was conversant with the current scandal, and had small encouragement from her grave face and preoccupied demeanour.

"I have heard something of the sad affair," was her response when the skeleton of the tale was held up to her. "These things are generally exaggerated. So, it is best to say as little as possible about them. Mr. de Baun heard that Mr. Cornelius Van Dyck had gone off—it was believed with Mrs. Scheffelin—and went to see Mrs. Van Dyck as her pastor, to offer any services in his power. He learned very little beyond what had been told him already. I am going to see how Mr. Van Dyck is to-day. He had a bad headache yesterday, which was not to be wondered at."

The sapient mulatto had the instinct of her race and class in appraising the social quality of her associates. She had never wavered in her estimate of her mistress as "a born lady" during the seven years of her residence under the parsonage roof. She recognized her superiority now, and bowed to it. Neighbourhood gossip was tabooed

in the household. Mrs. de Baun passed from the discarded scandal to orders for dinner and memoranda of articles to be purchased at the store. From all that could be inferred from her behaviour, her interest in the visit she was to make was less lively than in sugar, coffee and spices.

Cort Van Dyck emerged from the mill, and ran across the road to take her horse, at the gate.

"How is your father to-day?" was her first query.

Her manner had not a tinge of perfumtoriness, or significant sympathy, and the son looked relieved.

"Rather better, thank you!" he rejoined. "He's up and about. I guess he'll be all right soon. Dominie and children well?"

"Thank you, we are all in our usual excellent health."

The cordial smile that went with the words put him entirely at ease.

Here, at any rate, was one acquaintance who did not feel that a blight had fallen upon the entire family. He tied the horse to the rack hurriedly.

"Hold on, Mrs. de Baun! don't try to go up that path alone! Let me lend a hand!"

He carried out the purpose literally by putting both his hands under her elbows and supporting the entire weight of her body while she walked up the hill. Her laugh had a girlish ring as she yielded to the human propeller. The action was awkward to grotesqueness, but the youth meant the best that was in him, and she saw it. How Ed would shout when she told him of it!

The mother presented a shocked face at the door.

"Cort! how *dare* you take such a liberty with a lady? You mustn't mind him, Mrs. de Baun! He forgets he ain't a boy any more!"

"He will always be a boy to me," beaming gratefully

upon the loutish gallant. "I am much obliged to you for bringing me up! I never got up so easily before."

Mrs. Van Dyck looked after him as he ran back to the mill, her eyes dark with trouble.

"He's got to do double work now. I might say '*thribble*!' Father is right down miserable, and there's no telling when he'll be able to do another hand's turn. He told me this morning that he couldn't remember a single promise in the whole Bible—except that one text was running in his head the whole time,—'All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me!'"

She repeated it on the threshold of the room in which her husband sat, pillow'd in his big arm chair. He caught the text:

"That's the truth, ma'am!" holding the hand the visitor laid in his tremulous grasp. "I couldn't sleep a wink all night for it! Not another verse could I recollect. It kept poundin' in my ears until I 'most believed I could hear the waves and feel them a-washin' over me."

"That was because you were some light-headed, father," said the wife, a ring of impatience in the tone. "And Sarah was layin' fresh cloths on your head all the time. That was the washin' you heard."

He looked the obstinacy he dared not express. His resolute helpmate was more than a match for him when both were in health. Now, beaten and broken, he durst not maintain his ground.

The minister of mercy sat down by him and again took his hand. Hers was soft and cool.

"It feels *good!*" he muttered, the pitiful pretence of a smile wrinkling his cheeks.

"I have a text for you that must drive away the one that troubles you. It was made for just such times and for the Father's tried and tempted children."

She bent to his ear: and recited it very slowly:

“‘*What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.*’

“There is another that goes with it: ‘*He will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape.*’ My husband tells me that ‘tempted’ there should be translated ‘tried.’ These two texts have been a help to me when I was in deep waters. I felt I must let you have them.”

He had closed his eyes as she began speaking, and now two tears slipped between the lids and rolled down his face. The lady wiped them with her handkerchief, as his daughter might have done.

“I leave both texts with you,” she continued, soothingly. “Let them run in your mind as much as they will. They will be like the ‘stream’ in the hymn you are so fond of. Do you remember how often you give it out at prayer-meeting?”

“‘*Life, love and joy still gliding through,
And watering our divine abode.*’”

Her woman’s wit had reckoned cunningly upon a ruling passion, and woman’s tact seized upon the method of playing upon it. Elder Van Dyck was “gifted in prayer,” and, in his own opinion, not destitute of a talent for exhortation. He responded to the appeal as an old war-horse to the trumpet-call.

“Thank you!” he said in a voice that was almost natural. “I think you were *sent* to me to-day!”

His wife broke into passionate sobs. “I *know* she was! And us, that have been real hateful to you lately! When, all the time, you and the Dominie were tryin’ to coax young folks—our boys among them—to keep decent com-

pany and find their pleasure in innocent fun! I can see it now when it's too late! Maybe this is a judgment upon us for holdin' out against you!"

"Dear Mrs. Van Dyck! The Father has no judgment for His children here. When He corrects us, it is for our good. Don't add to your unhappiness by trying to find out why your grief was sent to you. But be sure that it cannot be for such a trifle as that you speak of. May I say something else that has been in my mind ever since I heard of your sorrow? *God loves your boy better than you do!* In His own good time He will make you understand that. Now—only *believe it!*"

She wondered, when the exaltation of the moment was passed, how she could have said it all. She never knew that Mrs. Van Dyck reported to Norman Lang that she "talked just like somebody inspired."

Rising from the bedside, she "hoped she had not tired Mr. Van Dyck," and asked if she might see Sarah.

The girl was in the kitchen assisting her aunt and the "bound girl" with the week's ironing, delayed on account of the tempest which had wrecked domestic system and happiness the previous day.

Sarah raised a changed face from the work to answer her mother's call. It was not only that the rose-flush that would have made her beautiful had her features been irregular, had faded into ashy pallor, but she had aged out of all likeness to her normal self. "Withered and hardened!" was her friend's unspoken comment.

A rush of love and pity swept her off the balance she had maintained in the father's presence. She took the girl into her motherly embrace:

"Dear child! you do not look fit to be at work! Come with me and rest for a little while. Good morning, Sauchy! You will spare Sarah for half-an-hour—won't

you? She looks half-sick! Mrs. Van Dyck! may we go into the back parlour? We won't disturb Mr. Van Dyck by going in *there*!"—when the hostess moved toward the sitting-room.

Sarah had not had time for a word when she found herself in the cool twilight of the "company" quarters. The shutters barred out the sunshine that might dim the splendours of the "real" Brussels carpet; the muslin curtains fell in moveless folds to the floor; every black horse-hair chair and the sofa that matched them in sombre massiveness, kept its appointed place. Mrs. de Baun gasped for breath.

"Do you think your mother would mind if I opened a window and one blind?" she asked—and before she had the answer had let in a streak of daylight and a whiff of fresh air.

Her next movement was as impetuous. She sat down in the state rocking-chair near the window she had raised, and took Sarah upon her lap.

"Put your head down, dear, and have your cry out!" she cooed, and began to rock her gently in the great chair.

Modern science has put nursery rockers and rocking out of court, as unsanitary relics of a barbarous early age. Mother-love and Nature revert to barbaric custom when a hurt is to be healed, and weariness to be beguiled into slumber. And now,—as when the first mother cradled her man-child in her arms—the rhythmic motion and the lullaby have magic charm, the wide world over.

Sarah sank into the nest of the encircling arms with the low wail of a spent and suffering child.

Then, for a long while, the room was still save for the faint swish of the rockers upon the thick carpet and the sound of convulsive sobbing, growing weaker and

more intermittent under the mute petting of the wise confidante. Not until the blessed tears had lessened the load upon her heart, did Sarah venture to speak. She sat upright and tried to smile:

“I am ashamed of myself! I have no right to distress you!”

A hand was laid over her mouth. Mrs. de Baun kissed the wet cheek.

“What are friends made for if not to help us bear our troubles? You take all this hard, and it is not strange that you should. But, little girl, nobody whose love is worth having will care less for you for what your brother has done. He has brought disgrace upon his father and broken his mother’s heart. You are their chief comfort. It is something—it is much—to be thankful for, that you can do this as nobody else can.”

From the first sentence she spoke she had seen that she had not chosen the right line of consolation. Sarah sat straight and stiff, her face settling into the unnatural mask it had worn when Mrs. de Baun had caught sight of it in the kitchen. She seemed to shrink and harden in listening. Far down in the blue eyes smouldered a gleam the lady could not interpret.

“Please *don’t*, Mrs. de Baun! There is no use trying to reconcile me to what has happened. Mr. de Baun prayed, when he was here yesterday, that we ‘might be reconciled to the will of God.’

“If I thought He let such things happen when He could have hindered it, I couldn’t believe in Him! I say it is cruel! *cruel!* to make us sinful and then punish us for doing wrong. It’s like *men!* not like the Heavenly Father we are taught to worship. I am *not* resigned! I don’t expect to be resigned—ever!”

“My child! you are out of your senses when you talk so

wildly!" She tried to hypnotise the excited creature by sheer force of will. "You are terribly broken up by the shock you have had. I wish"—with a sudden inspiration—"that you would go home with me, and stay a few days! It will do you no end of good to have a complete change of scene."

The girl twisted her hands nervously, with a short, bitter laugh.

"I don't suppose"—in a tone the listener would not have recognised had she not been looking at her—"there is another house in Kinapeg where I would be welcome now. The sooner I get used to the idea the better."

She uttered it deliberately, like one stating a proposition that had no personal bearing upon the speaker. The child was hard-hit, and incapable of seeing the truth.

"You are wrong there, my pet! Your true friends will rally around you to try and comfort you. I do not know another girl who is so much belovèd. Why, Mrs. Walker was telling me yesterday how, when hardly anybody would speak to her son after he came home last spring, you stopped him on the road, before the Post Office, and said you were glad to see him back and inquired after his mother. And that, while he was away, you looked in upon her almost every week, to see if there were anything you could do for her. And that you brought food and clothing for her—'as good as new.' A week at the Parsonage will put the world in a different light to you. I shall not be content until we have you. I must speak to your mother about it."

"Please don't, Mrs. de Baun! for I shall not go. People will talk, and you will be sorry some day that you asked me. But I don't think God ever made a better woman. If I ever pray again, I will beg Him constantly never to let trouble go near *you*."

"Sis takes It awful hard!" was Cort's comment upon the visitor's summary of her call. "You see she's never had any troulbe before, and she don't know what to do about it. 'Seems as if It had set her against the whole world."

He had watched Mrs. de Baun's exit from the house, and had her carriage ready when she got to the gate.

Two wagons and a carriage drove over the bridge while he lingered to talk to her, and she detected, with a pang at her heart, his evident gratification that they should be seen upon friendly terms. It revealed what was already the attitude of the disgraced family toward a critical world. Out of the fulness of her compassionate generosity, she purposely prolonged the interview.

"You must try to persuade her to come to me for two or three days," she replied, the heart-ache returning at sight of the pleasure turning the sun-burned face to a deeper red. "Bring her over, yourself. We are always glad to see any of you. And let me beg you not to seem to notice Sarah's depression. Only be very nice to her, and try to make her forget her trouble."

The brother leaned over the wheel confidentially.

"I heard just now that Will Corlaer is laid up with fever out in California, or some other place out West. He ain't dangerous, they say, but he has a nasty tech of fever, and ain't likely to be home so soon as was expected."

If he had expected her to betray appreciation of the connection the information might have with the subject of their conversation, he was mistaken. Will's ally was true to her trust.

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it. Mr. de Baun will go to see Mr. Corlaer and learn particulars. Good-bye!"

I am very much obliged to you for taking care of my horse—and of me!"

The arch brightness was gone from her face as she diverged from the direct route home into the turnpike running by the Corlaer place. She was impatient to get authentic tidings from California.

CHAPTER XVI

BY the time Mrs. de Baun had driven half-way up the curving sweep of the road leading from one of the two gates opening upon the Corlaer grounds, her anxiety for the heir-apparent of the house was measurably abated.

For Margarita's strong mezzo-soprano was strenuously demanding—

“What are the wild waves saying?”

of a peripatetic audience of three market-men with wagons loaded with “produce,” wending their sluggish way down the turnpike, and six dirty children impaling their chins upon the picket-fence. A sick, reminiscent thrill ran through the new arrival in recognising the duet between soprano and tenor that had received rapturous encores at the Christmas concert.

Sarah Van Dyck had looked her very prettiest that night, and Norman Lang did not conceal his pride in his pupil. The contrast of the mental picture with the ghastly visage she had seen, not half-an-hour ago, was not sadder than the comparison between the misery of one household with the bright prosperity of the other.

As she checked her horse at the front entrance, Carrie tripped swiftly from the far end of the vine-curtained veranda, followed closely by a young man who ran down the steps to assist the lady in alighting.

"My friend, Mr. Adrain, Mrs. de Baun!" uttered Carrie, in due formality.

The two shook hands, and Mrs. de Baun recalled instantly the rumour that Carrie had "caught a new beau at Saratoga."

"I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. de Baun in New Brunswick," he said, affably. "I was a freshman in college when he was a senior in the Seminary. He would hardly recollect me, but he may not have forgotten my father, Mr. Goyn Adrain, who has been a resident of New Brunswick all his life."

He ran it off with glib civility, and Carrie radiated with delight:

"*Dear Mrs. de Baun!* Mother will be *so* sorry she is not at home! She went down to town this morning for a day's shopping. But Margarita will be delighted to see you. I guess your call is more for her than for anybody else?"

The arch interrogation reminded the visitor that congratulatory calls were in order. She moved toward the hospitably-wide door.

Carrie danced before her to the drawing-room:

"*Rita! Rita!*"—drowning the strenuous declaration—"I hear no singing!" with—"Well! *we* can't hear anything else! Here's Mrs. de Baun, come to congratulate you. I told you she'd be one of the first to do it."

Margarita met the guest joyously:

"How *sweet* and dear in you!" she ejaculated, kissing her twice, and squeezing her hands until the knuckles rubbed together. "Norman was saying last night how he values your friendship, and how cordial Mr. de Baun was to him yesterday afternoon. He thinks all the world of you both!"

"Not quite 'all!'" the minister's wife contrived to ar-

ticulate with what was not a bad counterfeit of sincerity. "I congratulate you, and hope you will be very happy."

Quitting the slippery footing abruptly, she rushed on:

"I heard a few minutes ago of Will's illness, and hurried over to hear how he is now. When have you heard from him? Where is he? Is he really ill?"

Margarita laughed patronisingly: "Will was always your favourite of us all! Don't make yourself miserable over him! He had something like ship-fever after he got to California, and didn't shake it off as easily as he would have done if there had been decent doctors and decent houses out there. But he pulled through amazingly well in the long run. Norman says the climate where he is—high ground somewhere, but near enough to the coast to get the benefit of the sea-air—would almost bring the dead to life. When Will wrote last he was quite well again, although, of course, not as strong as he was before his illness. So he was going a little further up among the mountains, or somewhere. He has attended to the business that took him out. Norman says he has done better than might have been expected. It was about a contract for railroad iron, or something of that sort. I don't bother my brains with business-details. I told Norman, when he asked me to marry him, that he needn't expect me to be a business-partner. He says that would be the last thing he would want."

The simper and blush that went with the words were lost upon the auditor. Her manner was still grave, if less anxious:

"Is there any one to take care of him in camp? For I suppose that is where he is?"

"I think so!" carelessly. "I really haven't asked many questions. As you may imagine"—simper and blush in

full play—"I have had more important things to think of. Weren't you surprised to hear of IT?"

"Of your engagement—do you mean?" Had Margarita been less absorbed in her selfish bliss, she must have been irked by the dry tone. "I cannot say that I was! Had it happened last winter, we might have been taken by surprise. Those of us who have eyes have had our suspicions lately. It is a great relief to get such cheering accounts of your brother. Does he give you any idea of when we may expect him?"

"O-h-h! not for a month or six weeks, I should say. Maybe longer. It's an awfully tedious voyage, Norman says. And *he* is going on a longer, you know? I just try not to let my mind brood upon it. Indeed, Norman has made me promise not to! He says it will be hard enough for him to be absent three months, without having to think all the time how I am suffering at home. And you have seen what excited suspicion, you say? We thought we had thrown dust so cleverly into people's eyes that we would spring a big surprise upon the whole community. Even Father was not prepared for it. Norman went to him, right away, and told him all about it. Norman said he knew I was not making what might be called a brilliant match. And Father told him he was quite satisfied with my choice. He couldn't have said anything else. He appreciates Norman's talents and ability. He is sending him upon a confidential business trip, as a proof of his faith in him. Norman says that, next year, if all goes well, he will take me abroad with him. On a wedding tour, you understand?"

Mrs. de Baun nodded. She was thankful for the volatility that made verbal response difficult.

"Mother has always liked Norman, and she is naturally pleased. Carrie is enraptured! And while we are

talking confidentially, let me say that you may prepare yourself for another surprise. I think you, and all of us, will be glad to have the child well-settled. As for Will—he wouldn't count for much if he were here, but I am not afraid lest he might raise objections. Everybody likes Norman. And, as I was saying to him this morning—he came over to breakfast. Everything will be so upside down at the Van Dycks'—he thought it would be pleasanter all around for him not to be there. It was bad enough that he should be mixed up in it in any way—going down to the bank, and all that. But, as I was saying—we had a talk after breakfast and we agreed there seems to be a Providence in Will's being away just now. He is such a headstrong fellow that he would be as likely as not to hold on to his foolish fancy for Sarah, and make no end of trouble. Father gets black in the face when any allusion is made to it. I dropped a word or two on the subject last night after Norman went home, and you should have seen what a rage he flew into! Mother warned Carrie and me not to allude to it again. She says he didn't sleep last night, for thinking of it. He was always bitterly opposed to it, you know. When I heard how he went on about it I felt I couldn't be too thankful my choice had been so wise. As for Carrie, she turned pale as death, listening to him—poor child!

“Norman has been extremely kind to that family. I wonder at his being willing to stay there so long. It could never have been at all congenial to him. Sarah is the best of them. He has been a home-missionary to them all, but especially to her. She was never intellectual, but she has rather refined tastes and a decided taste for music. He directed her reading and developed her talent for music, and tried, as tactfully as he could, to train her in other ways. I have been in his confidence

this long while, and, while I didn't want her to marry my brother, I was willing to do all I could to elevate and refine her."

The insufferable patronage, blatant in speech and manner, drove Mrs. de Baun to protest:

"I am very fond of Sarah Van Dyck. She is one of the loveliest girls I know. I am never ashamed to introduce her to my friends, when they visit me. She reminds me of a pearl of price,—the fairer for her surroundings. She would make a good wife for any man. The difficulty would be to find one worthy of her. But I must be going! Please tell your mother how sorry I am to miss seeing her, and how happy the news of Will's improvement in health makes Mr. de Baun and myself."

They were on their feet, Margarita a-quiver with meaning smiles, and the other undisguisedly impatient of delay.

"And—no message for anybody else? He will be disappointed if you do not leave love and congratulations for him."

"I leave you to imagine all I ought to say, and to pass it on to him," was the desperate subterfuge by which the worried woman escaped. "You are better at making graceful speeches than I."

She had her acrid comment when the staid roadster was the solitary auditor:

"And *she* tried to 'refine and elevate' my poor Sarah! Heaven grant me patience!"

In the safe seclusion of her parsonage chamber she cried long and stormily. Her husband was shut up in his study with his Sunday sermon. From her window she could see the children playing in the back-yard under the eye of Rebecca Jane's daughter, who sat under a tree with her sewing. It was a scene of quiet home-life

that went to her heart, when she reviewed the morning's visits. What right had she to be exempt from tribulation, when waters of a full cup were dealt out to others as deserving of happiness as she? While she revolved the question in her mind, a bold thought sprang into life. She was as sure, as if it had been affirmed by Will Corlaer's sister, that nobody would tell him of the disaster that had befallen the family at the mill-farm. She had had a short letter written on the steamer and sent back by the pilot. In this Will had given her his San Francisco address, and to that she had dispatched a kind, sisterly reply, three weeks back. He was not in San Francisco now, according to Margarita's story, but somewhere in the mountains. Yet—light returning to the wet eyes and hope to the heavy heart—surely a letter sent to the one large city on the coast would be forwarded or kept for him! It was evidently a *Poste restante*, or she would have had another address. It would be the policy of the Corlaers to keep the son and brother in ignorance of the scandal, under the pretext of sparing him needless pain. He had loved Sarah Van Dyck the more stubbornly for the opposition he had met with from his parents.

"I shall never give her up until one of us dies, or she marries another man!" he had written in the steamer-letter to the mistress of the Manse. He was a commonplace fellow in many—in most—respects. He had a spice of chivalry in his make-up which would keep him from throwing over the girl he loved because the world turned against her.

The outcome of fifteen minutes' deliberation was the following letter:

"My dear Will: I am glad to hear that your indisposition was less serious than we had at first feared, and

that you are recovering rapidly under the influence of change of air and scene. May the blessed work go on until you are fully restored to health!

"I am taking the risk of sending this to San Francisco because something has happened here which I think you ought to hear from one who will tell you the facts in the case without prejudice.

"Cornelius Van Dyck eloped last week with Mrs. Schefelin, taking a large sum of his father's money with him. The family are in the deepest distress, as you may imagine. Mr. Van Dyck was so much overcome by the shock that we feared, for a time, serious consequences. I found him much better to-day. I cannot go into particulars. But you will want to know how the daughter bears the blow. She is an angel of mercy to her father, and very brave. I wish I could add that she is resigned to the affliction. She seems to feel it more keenly than any of the rest. I am trying to persuade her to pay us a visit of a few days. It may be that our care and the love she knows we have for her may comfort her somewhat.

"I take it for granted that you have been informed of Margarita's engagement to Mr. Lang? I saw her to-day for a short time. Mr. Lang is a most estimable young man, and I hope they will have all the happiness in life they anticipate.

"Mr. de Baun would join me in affectionate regards if he knew I am writing.

"To avoid Post Office gossip, I shall send this letter under cover to my sister in New York, and let her mail it there.

Faithfully your friend,

"Margaret de Baun.

"P. S. Upon reading this over, I fear you may think it cold and unsympathetic. I must assure you, dear boy,

that my heart aches to its depths for you both. May God help and guide you under the pain I know the news will cause you!"

The epistle, thus amended, went off to her city-sister that night, and the writer kept her own counsel. There are some things husbands are the happier for not knowing, even when their consorts emulate Solomon's Perfect Woman in virtue and discretion.

CHAPTER XVII

IN "A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker," we read:

"The houses of the higher classes were generally constructed of wood, excepting the gable end, which was of small black-and-white Dutch bricks, and always faced on the street, as our ancestors, like their descendants, were very much given to outward show, and were noted for putting the best leg foremost."

To this day, the traveller through the sections of the plucky little commonwealth adjoining the bigger and wealthier, smiles in recognising the Dutch element in a dozen different manifestations. At least seven out of ten old houses scattered among the hills, set close to highways laid out by the (more or less) "rude forefathers of the hamlet," and clustering about weather-beaten spires, stand with gables to the road. Perhaps six per cent. of them are framed and clapboarded with wood, and the ends enclosing the chimneys are of blackened bricks, or hewn stone roughly cemented together.

The Jersey Hollander carried the "best leg foremost" style of architecture into humble homes, no less than into "the houses of the higher classes." The Guard House was not a vain show of gentility, being of solid stone on all four sides. The smaller house, fifty feet to the rear of it, could never have had a remote pretension to any but the lowly class. It had but three rooms in all—one of fair size on the first floor, served the occupants as

dining-room and kitchen; the smaller as bed-chamber. A ladder-like stairway gave access from the larger room to a ceiled loft overhead. The gable next the turnpike was of stones of irregular sizes. The clapboarded gable was not visible from the post-road.

The house faced the creek—"river" by courtesy, and not a misnomer after spring and autumn freshets,—tumbling under the bridge beyond the Corlaer Place to join a sister-stream half a mile further down the valley.

"The Widow Walker" had lived in the little old house above the creek ever since her only son was six years old. She was the daughter of the village carpenter, a bright, energetic girl who was made much of in Sunday- and in day-school. At the age of twelve she became the maid and companion of Miss Katrina Corlaer, a confirmed invalid who lived in the wing of her brother's house for many years. The cripple grew very fond of Patsey Romeyn, and to her gentle training the girl owed qualities and manners that raised her above the rank and file of those who would naturally have been her intimates. She read aloud to Miss Katrina by the hour, and assimilated unconsciously much of what she read. She learned all manner of fine needlework, and dainty ways of performing common duties of which many of her superiors in social position remained forever ignorant.

She was twenty when her benefactress died, and Patsey married a Millville mechanic who had courted her assiduously for two years. She was thirty-five when she returned to Kinapeg. Her husband had lingered out six years of helplessness and pain, as the result of a fall from the roof of a building he was "tinning." He had no resource but to pull steadily upon his slender savings for the daily bread of himself and family until the last dollar was gone. Then he mortgaged, up to the chimney-

top, the house he had hoped to make a permanent home, and died, more of a broken heart than a broken spine. Two children had preceded him to the Kinapeg cemetery in which Patsey's father owned a lot. He lay in a corner of it now, and his wife beside him.

But for her Dick, Patsey had not a near relative in this world when, having sold her house and most of her furniture and barely paid the mortgage with the proceeds of the sale, she followed the advice of Wilhelmus Corlaer, her life-long friend, and brought the scanty remnants of her humble fortunes to her birthplace. Living was cheap there by comparison with Millville prices, and there was no healthier site in the world than the hill-girt valley. Dick was a delicate child, and he was her earthly all. We have seen that the Guard House belonged to Timothy O. Brouwer, and the deed-of-sale took in the property running down to the creek. Patsey may have suspected, but she was never told, that she might have thanked Mr. Corlaer, instead of his richer neighbour, for the offer of the stone-gabled cottage, rent-free, as long as she chose to live in it. Timothy O. informed her, in his magniloquent manner, that she had "better friends in Kinapeg than anywhere else, and he was going to prove it by putting a weather-tight roof over her head until the little rascal over there"—shaking his great head at her boy—"was able to buy her a better."

Mr. Corlaer made the squalid shell of a dwelling comfortable by repairing walls and roof, and his wife eked out the forlorn array of household goods from her own bountiful store. Mr. Corlaer had insisted upon paying the expenses of little Katrina's funeral, "because she was his sister's namesake," and had a different, but as cogent a reason for defraying the heavier cost of poor Walker's obsequies.

All the neighbours were kind to the lonely woman, in their way. In every household the washing was done at home, but Patsey soon earned a reputation for clear-starching and other fine laundry-work, and had her hands full all summer long, doing up best muslin frocks and lace-trimmed "spencers." The Brouwer sisters and aunts were lavish in orders, and semi-annual house-cleanings were a fruitful source of income.

She toiled and contrived to feed and clothe her boy and herself, thankful that, at the end of each year, she could see that she had made both ends meet, and laid aside a little against a rainy day. She had abundance of the finest brand of independence. She accepted neighbourly offices when they took the form of provisions, firewood and coal. It was the fashion of the country. She had heard Mrs. de Baun tell a city-friend that not a day had passed of their eight years' residence in the Valley without bringing to the Parsonage tokens of goodwill and affection in the shape of substantial provisions for her larder, or delicacy for the table. Patsey had, herself, carried to the Dominie's family many a basket of wild berries, a dozen eggs, or a chicken of her own raising; a pan of gingerbread or loaf of the corn bread for which she was famous. There was no loss of self-respect in the acceptance of gifts of this kind.

Dick thrrove like a tree of the Lord's own planting. This was his mother's simile. And that he "grew in favour both with God and man." He had inherited his mother's active mind and manual deftness, carrying off more school-prizes than any other pupil in his classes, shining in exhibitions, and turning an occasional honest penny by assisting farmers in busy seasons and lending a hand on holidays and Saturdays in the "store."

At eighteen, he was offered a petty clerkship in the

latter, the proprietor having taken a fancy to the "smart" lad. Patsey strained several points to dress him suitably for his exalted position. He would soon be supporting himself, and what use had she for money for herself so long as she had her head and hands? Her boy must not be ashamed of his clothes in the presence of customers and loungers.

Elbert Schenck, his employer, loved his ease too well to burden himself with tasks he could have performed by paid proxy. It was not generally known that he had shunted much of the work devolving upon him as postmaster, off upon his young assistant until the bolt from the blue startled the community, and crushed Patsey Walker's air-castles into dust.

That season is still spoken of in the Valley as the "cruel-hard winter of 185—."

Half of the factories in Millville shut down for want of work; Mr. Corlaer made no secret of the truth that he was losing money daily by running his foundry and forges on half-time. The cold was intense; storms were frequent, and severe.

Early in December, Patsey Walker had a dangerous illness. She was bed-ridden for two months, and was just feebly creeping around the room, when Dick made his "mistake." It was pleaded at the trial (by a lawyer hired by Mr. Corlaer) that the young fellow was mad with distress and anxiety on account of his mother's condition; that he thought her life might depend upon the purchase of comforts requisite for her recovery; that he had always been a dutiful and loving son, and borne a spotless reputation in the neighbourhood. With much more to the same effect which, undoubtedly, availed to shorten the term of imprisonment.

Patsey confided to her pastor that she had not known

sorrow that deserved the name until she heard what her boy's fate was to be. She wondered if the Heavenly Father, to whom she clung as a drowning man to a floating mast, ever really knew how she managed to live through that awful twelvemonth. She was sure of one thing, and wondered exceedingly thereat—to wit, that the shock killed the roots of the disease which had laid her low. “But I think it was the devil who told me—‘Arise and walk?’”—she said to Mrs. de Baun months later, with the touch of whimsical humour that survived the wreck of hope and pride. “I just felt that I *must* fight somebody or something, and I’d begin with what was the cause of it all. If it hadn’t been for that spell of sickness, the awful temptation wouldn’t have been sent to my darling. So I said, ‘I will down *that*, first of all!’”

In a month she was at work—years older than when she lay down on the night of her seizure, and less sprightly in manner and speech, but she was her resolute, unconquered self, with a goal in view which she never lost sight of in a waking moment. She would get ready for Dick’s home-coming and stand at his side to help live down this monstrous wrong done in the name of Law and Humanity. The loyalty of her lifelong friends and the visits of the minister’s wife, Sarah Van Dyck and other Christ-like souls saved her from misanthropy. But the arrow need not be poisoned in order to leave a festering sore.

She would not have believed, a half-year back, that she could ever be so nearly care-free as on the November evening when she sat down with her son to the supper she had kept hot for him against his belated return from the Works.

“You see, Mr. Corlaer was not at home to-day, and

somehow, a fellow has an idea that he is more responsible for what he does then, than if the boss were there," said Dick, when the first dozen mouthfuls had measurably appeased his appetite. "He laid out a lot of letters to copy. I could have left some until to-morrow, but I thought I'd sleep better if I got them all done."

"That's right!" The assent was hearty. "It's lucky you paid so much attention to your handwriting when you were at school. He told me last Sunday how well you were doin'. He knew he couldn't please me more than by sayin' that. He has the name of bein' a hard man with them that don't know him. I've known Wilhelmus Corlaer nine-and-thirty years, and never had a sharp word from him. And in the day of trouble—But *there!* There's no use in me beginnin' to talk about *that!* Have some more!" She put a second egg and slice of ham upon his plate. "And you'll never taste better buttermilk-pop than that, if you live to be a hundred!"

Her chief joy in her renewed life was to see him contented and normal. The "jail-bird look" we are ready to detect, had passed from him as ugly mist from glass. He had clear blue eyes, and he looked his fellows directly in the face when spoken to; walked among men with head erect and broad shoulders squared. He had what hundreds of other "jail-birds" have gone to the devil because no man gave it unto them—a fair chance to retrieve the first misstep. Mr. Corlaer had braved the disapproval of friend and neighbour by taking the young man into his office a month before. His "son's absence left him shorthanded," he remarked briefly, when a critic, bolder than the rest, intimated that it was a hazardous thing to place trust in one "with a record."

"The boy is trying to keep straight, and I mean to help him. He has honest blood in him. I believe it will work out right in the long run."

The room in which mother and son sat at supper was plainly furnished, but scrupulously neat in every appointment. Patsey clung to the open fireplace when every other housewife in the village had her cook-stove. She had "learned to cook over the coals," she persisted, "and was too old to take to new tricks." Her Dutch oven, skillet, frying-pan, big and little kettles, were black and bright; her pewter dishes and crockery were cared for as faithfully as if she had anticipated the craze for native antiques which would attack her countrywomen a quarter-century later.

Dick had made the broad low settee of red cedar which stood against the wall, and two of the chairs his mother had cushioned and draped with Turkey-red. A Boston rocker was her accustomed seat. Dick had his father's elbow-chair at the corner of the hearth. Tears blinded the mother, sometimes, as he smoked his after-dinner pipe, lolling back with his legs crossed—"for all the world like Richard Walker used to do when the day's work was done!" "And to think"—this to herself—"that, for all those dreadful months, I never dared hope to see him there again, and worthy to sit in his father's place! 'Bless the Lord, O, my soul! and forget not all His benefits!'"

Dick stooped to stir the fire vigorously while she was washing and clearing away the supper-dishes.

"Who'd have thought of having a roaring big fire like this the twenty-eighth of November! And listen to the wind! You might think it was Christmas. By Jingo! it makes a fellow feel good all through to have a home like this—and"—with the shyness common to his class

when finer feelings crave expression—"a mother like mine!"

"It's real nice to hear you say it, my boy!"

The break in her voice, and the shining eyes said a hundredfold more than the words. Was there a happier woman in the length and breadth of the Jerseys, that blustering night, than she?

Dick stood with his back to her, apparently staring into the fire, and the task of washing-up and clearing-off went forward briskly. The wind howled and whistled and cried in the naked trees of the grove, and the bawling creek carried on the theme. Abrupt gusts gurgled in the chimney-throat and blew the coals into redder flashes. It was truly a night to awaken thankfulness in the hearts of the safely and snugly housed, and to curse the homeless with paroxysms of nostalgic nausea.

"By Jingo!" ejaculated Dick, again. "I'd better fill your wood-box, if this sort of thing is going to keep up. If the wind should go down, we'll have a black frost before morning!"

He buttoned his coat over his chest, pulled his cap far down over his ears, and went off. The door did not latch tightly after him, and a fiercer blast blew it open and brought a whirl of dead leaves into the room. Patsey caught the door and held it for a moment to peer into the outer darkness. The stars were out, and steely bright. Between her and them the trees waved and brandished bare black arms. She slammed the door hard into place, and shuddered aloud.

"Goodness gracious me! It's a young hurricane!"

It may have been five minutes before she heard Dick's stumbling step outside. Before she could reach the door to unlatch it, he thumped heavily against it—a queer muffled thud that shook it from top to bottom.

“In the name of common sense!” she began.

The exclamation was a shriek as her son staggered in, carrying the figure of a woman in his arms.

Without speaking, he bore his burden to the settee and laid it down very gently.

A brown cloak enveloped the moveless form and a hood had fallen quite over the face, but Patsey recognised her at a glance.

“Dick Walker! It’s never Sarah Van Dyck! Is she *dead*?”

Dick’s horror and distress were a thousand removes from flippancy, yet he answered in the slang of the period:

“Well! it ain’t anybody else! And if she’s dead, I’ve killed her!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE inestimable blessing of The Trained Nurse was still in the womb of futurity, but Patsey Walker was born to the business, and had had an apprenticeship in the service of her first mistress.

Bidding her son "Hold your tongue, and pull off her shoes!" she untied and removed the smothering hood, unbuttoned the cloak and opened the girl's dress at the throat. A gasp and a groan answered her ministrations. Then Sarah lay again motionless, and seemingly breathless.

"A dead faint!" pronounced Patsey. "Rub her feet, while I get the hartshorn!"

She brought a palm-leaf fan with the bottle of ammonia, and showed her assistant how to draw the air over the prostrate form in long, slow currents. Then she fell to her part of the work so intelligently that signs of resuscitation were speedily visible. Sarah stirred, caught a few convulsive breaths and opened her eyes upon the kind face above her.

"Mrs. Walker! Then—I must be *alive!*" she whispered, agonisedly.

One could not misread the passion of regret.

She had thought herself dead. It was misery to be alive.

"Yes, my lamb! Thank God you are alive, and going to live. It would have broken more hearts than one if you had gone."

She was chafing the cold hands, as if to impart the warmth of her own pulses to them.

"You're comin' 'round finely now, honey! No! don't try to talk! Just lie still until you are stronger." She left her patient for a minute, and was back again with a glass. Slipping her arm under Sarah's head, she held it to her lips. "O, I know you don't think you can swallow it, but you can! There! I told you so! The colour is comin' back. You'll be right as a trivet soon." She stood up, the emptied wine-glass in her hand, and watched the white face with a smile of tender encouragement. "It *ought* to do you good! It's wine Mrs. Corlaer sent me the winter I was sick. I put it away to keep it until somebody that was good enough to drink it happened along. I'm glad it's you, dearie!"

Sarah's eyes opened wide—the pale lips writhed in a bitter smile: "*She* wouldn't be!" she said, faintly.

"There's where you're mistaken, child!" retorted Patsey, bravely. Her task now was to bring the girl around at the cost of no matter how many lies. "She's got a soft spot in her heart for you. I don't know anybody that hasn't."

Her fingers were upon the girl's wrist. She patted it in letting it go.

"It's gettin' stronger every second. Now, dear, Dick will run around to your house and let them know you are safe with me. They'll be uneasy when you don't come home."

"No! no! no!" In the energy of the denial she raised herself to a sitting posture, then fell back, exhausted.

Patsey had to stoop to catch the words uttered in a whisper, yet energetically. "They think I'm at the Parsonage to-night. I told them—I was going—there. To stay all night!"

"And you haven't been there?" The girl ought not to talk, but some things she must know.

"No! I—didn't—mean to go. I told—a—*lie!* One more—or less—don't matter!"

The inscrutable smile twisted her mouth again. She turned her face to the back of the settee with a petulant gesture.

"That's all right! You shan't be bothered to answer any more questions. You are to stay here all night. It's freezin' cold, and I've as comfortable a bed as any in the country. You will sleep in that, and I'll sleep in here on the settee. I always do when we have company. And 'tisn't often we have such company as we've got to-night—hey, Dick?"

"That's a fact—certain sure!" He came nobly up to her expectations.

But he had an idea of his own and it must out.

"I say, Momsie—" shifting his bulk from one foot to the other. "Suppose some of them might happen to say something to the Dominie or Mrs. de Baun about her having spent the night at the Parsonage—what then?"

The possibility seemed to terrify the guest. She turned frightened eyes from mother to son; her hands quivered painfully.

Patsey clapped her boy's shoulder.

"Smart fellow! This is *our* secret, and nobody else's. But it's as well to take no chances. Now, sonny, you go to the Parsonage and see the Dominie and his wife—both of them! mind you! and say that Miss Sarah was comin' to stay all night there, but had a kind of faint turn when she got here, and, seein' the night is so awful cold, I wouldn't let her go any further. Then—make sure Rebecca Jane isn't cruisin' anywhere in the offin'"—(a borrowed phrase of which she was innocently vain)—

"and ask them, please, never to mention that she didn't go to them, if any of the family should happen to speak of her spendin' the night at the Parsonage—*as she expected to do*," emphasising every syllable by a tap upon his coat-sleeve. "She don't want to make her father uneasy, and she'll be all right in the mornin'. If that isn't just the straight truth, it's as near to it as it's safe to go. Tellin' all the truth is sometimes the wickedest thing a body can do, and a lie that's meant to do somebody a good turn gets bleached in the tellin'—to my way of thinkin'. Now, run along, boy! You've got your lesson. Stick to it!"

A wan smile flitted across Sarah's face as the door closed after the messenger.

"You are too kind to me!" she faltered, raising her hand to the cheek of her hostess, as she knelt on the floor beside her to arrange the cushions under her head and tuck the shawl over her feet. "I ought not to let you do so much."

"Don't say a word, honey! If you belonged to me, I couldn't think more of you. But, tell me! have you had never a mouthful of supper? Where have you been all the time? What happened to you? Did you fall?"

Slow tears filled Sarah's eyes. "I couldn't eat a mouthful if I had it. I was just wandering around—*wishing I was dead!*"

Patsey did not start visibly at the unexpected outburst, but her heart stood still.

"There! there! don't try to talk until you're stronger! I'll put you in my bed while Dick is out, and lay a bottle of hot water to your feet and make you drink a cup of hot milk. That's the best thing I know of to make you sleep sound, when you're tired and nervous. And in the mornin' you can slip down to the Parsonage if you

like. Maybe *'twould* be better to be able to say you've been there. Dick's a close-mouthed fellow. He won't give you away to the Dominie, or anybody else. You see, nothing could be safer and straighter. Lie still while I get your bed ready!"

Sarah did not observe that the door of the inner room stood wide open while the clean sheets were spread upon the bed, and extra covers piled over them. Patsey confessed to her close-mouthed son afterward that she "wouldn't have been surprised to find the bird flown if she hadn't kept an eye upon her all the time. If she'd run away once, there was no tellin' when she might be taken that way again."

Her charge gave her no more trouble, submitting with the docility of a child to be undressed, and to have one of Patsey's nightgowns put upon her and Patsey's finest nightcap tied over her hair when Patsey had combed it and rolled it into a loose knot. She got into bed meekly and dumbly, and the hot-water bottle was adjusted to her ice-cold feet. But when the nurse smoothed the covers snugly about her shoulders and bade her "Good night! and wake up bright and well in the morning!" she clasped her arms (so thin Patsey wondered at them) about her friend's neck, and melted into tears.

"I can't thank you as I ought to, Mrs. Walker! I am not worth it all. But I have had a great deal to bear lately, and I am not as strong as I used to be."

Mrs. Van Dyck would have been horrified had she seen the action and the kiss that responded to it. Patsey Walker was a "very common person," and the caress was an impertinence.

The angels—and the Dominie—might have had a different opinion.

The guest was sleeping soundly in the darkened inner

room, thus strengthening Patsey's faith in hot milk as a soporific, before Dick returned. His mother, hearing his footsteps upon the gravel walk, hastened to forestall his entrance and possible unnecessary bustle. At sight of her lifted finger he came in on tiptoe. As noiselessly she went to the chamber-door and listened for sounds to indicate that he had disturbed the sleeper. Then she shut the door carefully and tiptoed back to the fire and her son. Not once in the ensuing dialogue was either betrayed into an ejaculation that could have penetrated the closed door.

Dick had delivered his message, word for word, as it was dictated to him. Mr. and Mrs. de Baun had verified Patsey's prediction of their trustworthiness, and thanked him for putting them upon their guard. This settled, the pent-up curiosity Patsey had smothered all the evening, broke bounds:

“Now—for the land's sake, wherever did you find her?”

Dick's tale was brief and graphic. He was on his way to the woodpile, when he discerned a figure moving stealthily between him and the gleaming water at the foot of the hill. The creek, swollen by autumnal rains, was broad and turbulent, catching the star-rays at a myriad points. Nobody could have any sensible motive for wandering upon the banks on such a cold night, reasoned the young man, and he gave chase as stealthily as the nocturnal wanderer glided among the tree-trunks. There was an open space upon the brink where his mother sometimes did her washing in hot weather. When the figure reached this space it paused and sat—or knelt—down upon the ground. The pause gave the pursuer time to get close enough to see that it was a woman, and there was something familiar in the outlines.

We will let him finish the story:

"Still I never mistrusted who it might be until I heard her say out loud—'O God! you will forgive me—won't you? I am too miserable to live! I *can't* bear it any longer!' Then she jumped up and was about to throw herself plump into the water—it's awfully deep just there, you know, and rushing like mad—when I got hold of her cloak. She gave a little scream and tried to get loose, and I said—'Miss Sarah! it's only Dick Walker! You would have been drowned if I hadn't been here!'

"And then she dropped, like a dead woman, on the ground. I thought maybe I had killed her. She might have had heart-disease or something, you know."

"I'm afraid she *has* trouble with her heart," mused Patsey, sagely, "but not the kind you're thinkin' of. We can never be thankful enough that Providence sent you to that spot at that very minute. His ways are past findin' out. That cussèd brother of hers and her finicky mother and old Pharisee of a father have driven her crazy—that's the whole of it. If wishes were horses, Will Corlaer would be home and lookin' after her, this blessed minute, instead of nursin' his own health a thousand miles away!"

"That is something else I had to say!" interrupted Dick, eagerly. "As I passed the Corlaer house, a buggy drove up to the door and stopped. Mr. Corlaer got out and another man—not quite so tall—and he moved stiffly. But if it wasn't Will Corlaer, it was somebody enough like him to be his twin. I shouldn't be surprised if he had come back unexpectedly."

His mother clasped her hands devoutly. "Now, the Lord be praised, if this is so! 'Twould seem like providence was playin' right into my hands. I *can't* sleep a wink without I am sure of it. Do you slip across the road and peek into the back windows, or have a word with

the folks in the kitchen, and find out whether Will is home, or not. And not a syllable about who's here, you understand!"

She bent her head upon the table and prayed while he was gone. It was the unlettered Christian's way to carry all things, both small and great, to the Friend Who was never far from her. Prayer was "tellin' Him all about it," in her creed. A favorite hymn described it as—

"the Christian's vital breath."

To support life without it would have been an impossibility.

The answer now was speedy and favorable. Will Corlaer had taken an earlier steamer than that by which he had intended to sail, and landed in New York that day. Meeting his father by accident in Millville, they had come home together. Mrs. Corlaer was wild with delight, crying and laughing together, Dick reported.

Prayer was changed to praise in Patsey's soul. She actually hugged her son in the exultation that possessed her. There was no longer the shadow of a doubt as to the position held by Providence. The near-catastrophe which had brought Sarah Van Dyck to her door that night, was a part of the plan. Her next step was to get Sarah safely into the Parsonage, and—in some way—to be indicated by Providence—to let Will Corlaer know that she was there.

The face that met Sarah's eyes at her awakening in the morning was an irresistible tonic.

The patient acknowledged the potency in the response to the confident—"You're ever and ever so much better, dear child!"

"It makes me feel better to look at *you*!"

The plain visage, goodly with reflected light from within, brightened at the tribute.

"That's the best thing you could have said! Now, I'm going to sponge your face and hands with warm water, with just a dash of cologne in it to freshen you up. Then you'll have breakfast in bed, and lie still a little while. Dick's had his and gone, an hour ago. When you're good and rested, I'll walk along with you to the Parsonage. Unless, maybe, you'd like to have the Dominie come for you in the buggy."

Sarah protested. She was "quite well, after last night's rest."

"I didn't know I could ever sleep soundly again," she owned, gratefully. "I believe—" with a sickly attempt at humour—"that you put laudanum into that hot milk."

"No need to do it, honey! The milk does the business by itself. It's a beautiful day—cold, but the wind went down about midnight, and the sun is shining bright. If you are strong enough to walk so far, the air will do you good. My husband used to say the air that blows off the Kinapeg hills was like iced-champagne. Not that he had drunk enough champagne to be much of a judge of the article!"

Her laugh went well with her jovial face. She was mopping the hollowed temples and trying not to notice that she could see the light through the wasted hands.

"What you want is plenty of it—the air, I mean—You've stayed too close at home, this great while. And worried too much. Everything's comin' out right pretty soon. You look as sweet as a rose. Now, for breakfast!"

Her cheery prattle flowed on while the toast, coffee and poached egg were served. If they were not partaken of

zestfully, she was not disappointed. She had her recompense in the languid smile and—

“I have not eaten so much, this long while. Everything you cook tastes just right. I did not know anything could be so good ever again.”

“Makes me say what I do say!” rejoined Patsey, in her briskest manner: “What you need is *change!* And you’ve got to have it—or I’ll know the reason why. Stop worrying! That’s the first thing! Next is—Believe everything is bound to come out right in God’s own time!”

She had the outer room in order before Sarah appeared from the inner.

The sunlight poured through the window, and the fire was all a-glow with rival radiance. A tortoise-shell cat basked upon the rug. The window-sills were filled with scarlet geraniums.

Sarah took a long breath as if to inhale the light with the warmth.

“O, how delightful! I had no idea this was such a nice room.” She caught sight of the time-piece on the mantel and started in amazement. “Can it be nine o’clock! Why did you let me sleep so long? I’m afraid it has hindered your work.”

“My work, just now, is to please myself by seein’ how comfortable I can make the very sweetest girl in Kina-pegs!” asserted the hostess. “I fair hate to have you go, but when you feel able, we’ll stroll toward the Parsonage. Take your time! It would tickle me to pieces to have you stay all day with me.”

Once outside, she insisted they should “take it easy” for the first hundred yards. Innate delicacy restrained her inclination to loiter on the bridge and look down into the swift, brown waters that filled the channel from

bank to bank. She recollected how dark and wild they were last night, and the deep hollow close to the shore.

"Was there ever such a day!" lifting her head to get her fill of the mountain-breeze. "And don't the steeple look just too pretty in the sunshine? I always do say that our Church and Parsonage make the nicest picture anybody would want to have. And the folks inside the Parsonage suit the picture."

The breeze had beaten a faint pink into Sarah's cheeks by the time Mrs. de Baun, having seen them from the window, met them in the porch.

Again Patsey's inborn tact was manifest in her refusal to go in. She must "hurry back and look after bakin' and churnin' and mercy knew how many other odds-and-ends."

She did not care to meet Mrs. de Baun's steady, interrogative eyes, or to be obliged to dodge the truth under the Dominie's questionings into the nature of the swoon which had prostrated the girl at her door. Somehow, circumlocution—no matter how righteous the cause in which it was employed—was a difficult task when facing her pastor. Lastly, reasoned the arch-strategist, duties more important than baking and butter-making awaited her nearer home. She trusted devoutly that Providence would not force her hand. If it did—well, *there!* it was against her principles to cross a bridge before she got to it.

She got home without meeting a human being, and shut herself safely within her sanctum. Not trying to account for the haste with which she set the inner room in order and the expectant flutter she could not calm as she sat down to her sewing, the room as tidy as head and hands could make it—she knew that she was waiting

and hoping—and praying—for the sound of a step without, and a familiar “rap! rap! rap!” upon her door.

It was ten o’clock before step and knock were heard. The latch was lifted with the confidence of a frequent visitor.

“I knew you were at home!” said Will Corlaer, shaking the hands laid in his. “I saw you come back. I saw you go, too, from my window. Sit down, and tell me about her.” He had not let her hand go in seating himself and her. “I watched you all the way to the Parsonage. How is she, Patsey?”

She waived preliminaries as recklessly as he disdained them:

“Well, Mr. Will! if you want the plain, flat-footed truth, they have nigh upon killed her amongst them. She fainted clean-away at my door last night. She was expected to stay all night at the Parsonage, but she got no further than this. And when she come to, I kep’ her, of course, and sent word to Mrs. de Baun where she was. This mornin’ I took her to the Parsonage, as you saw. She’s wore away pretty near to skin-and-bone. It’s been bad enough for all of them, but she’s taken it hardest. I can’t help thinkin’ if you’d been home, it would have been different, somehow.”

“I came as soon as I heard of it, Patsey! Nobody was friendly enough to let me know it until Mrs. de Baun, like the angel she is, wrote to me. I sailed by the first boat after I had her letter. I have not spoken of the story at home, and they take for granted that I know nothing of it. I was sure you would be fair and square with me. I should have gone straight to Mrs. de Baun if I hadn’t espied you from the window. They are all against me. It almost broke her heart to know that, before I went away. She told me once that she would never

marry me so long as my father and mother opposed me. By heaven! she *shall* marry me now, if I have to drag her to the minister! I will show her there is one person in the world who will stand between her and disgrace, and try to make up to her for all she has suffered!"

She saw, now, in the broad light from the window, that he was haggard and thin from his recent illness; the eyelids were reddened, as by loss of sleep; the eyes glared upon her as she strove to soothe him:

"Willie, boy! I have nursed you in these arms when you were a baby, and I'm goin' to stand by you, now. Don't you worry over what she said then. She'll never need a friend more'n she does now. Go to her right away and tell her you've come home, on-a-purpose to marry her, if the whole world and all the kingdoms of it were against it. Don't take 'NO!' for an answer. If I was you, I'd buttonhole the Dominie, and force him to make you man-and-wife before the day is over. You are free to marry when you like, and she was twenty-one in July. If she wasn't, her parents wouldn't oppose it."

Distracted though he was with grief and indignation, Will could not help smiling.

"The Dominie wouldn't perform the ceremony in such circumstances. He is my father's friend. Nor do I want to marry without letting my parents understand what I mean to do—and why. I am tolerably sure I can win my mother to my side. If my father holds out—why, he must! He has a will of iron. But I am his son! I will fight for *her* and for happiness to the end!"

He had talked down the heat of passion, but the set of his jaw and an ugly red spark far down in his eyes warned the observer that Wilhelmus Corlaer had the fight of his life before him. Patsey's stout spirit trembled at the prospect.

"Time enough for that, dear! Many's the time I've heard Mrs. de Baun say, 'God always gives us light enough for the next step.' There's several steps between you and your father. You've got to go first to the Parsonage—straight as you can walk—before she goes home—and tell her why you won't take 'No' for an answer. Make her understand that angels and principalities and powers can't keep her from you. She is possessed with the notion that the family is disgraced, and, between you and me and the post, she ain't far wrong. But the family ain't *her!*"

Will laughed outright there. Then he sobered suddenly.

"If she tells me that disgrace has touched her, it will make no difference. I must impress that upon her. Good-bye, Patsey! Thank you a thousand times for what you've said. I told mother I was coming over to see you. If she should send for me, tell her I am at the Parsonage."

Mrs. de Baun and her young friend sat before the fire in the back-parlour when Rebecca Jane presented herself with a portentous air. ("I could think of nothing but 'big with news of Cato and of Rome,'" said the lady afterward to her husband.)

"If you wouldn't mind, ma'am, I'd like to speak to you!" Anticipating nothing more momentous than the tidings of a domestic mishap, the mistress of the manse, too used to her handmaiden's ways to be alarmed, followed her into the front hall where stood Will Corlaer, hat in hand.

The ready-witted woman lifted a warning finger.

"This way!" she whispered, convoyed him into the dining-room, and left him for a word to Rebecca Jane. "Tell Miss Sarah that I will be back in a few minutes,

and don't say who is here. Behave as if nothing were amiss! *I trust you!*" Saying which, she shut herself into the dining-room with her visitor.

If Sarah had surmised the "thing amiss," her conjectures were removed by the notes rippling from above where the songstress was polishing the brass stair-rod,

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

"We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear.
And often for each other flows
The sympathetic tear."

"I must have laughed when I heard her, if it had been at my own funeral!" the wife recounted that night in the safe seclusion of the study. "But it broke the ice. The poor boy was in the thickest of his story—and she articulates with such frightful distinctness! He looked horrified at my laugh, for a second. Then he caught the words, and *had* to be amused. Nothing could have been more apropos. I prepared Sarah by a very few words. I said—'Will Corlaer is here, dear. He has hurried back to see and to tell you that nothing can change him. He knows this sorrow has not disgraced you. If it had, he would love you all the more. I want you to listen to him patiently. It is but once in a life-time that a woman is loved as this true-hearted man loves you.'

"Then I sent him in. You know the rest."

CHAPTER XIX

PATSEY WALKER "knew the rest" before Dick came in for his midday meal. Whether sewing, or shredding cabbage, slicing onions, or peeling potatoes, she kept an eye upon the bridge seen through her western window. When finally she espied a figure, more alert and better-dressed than operative or farm-laborer, upon the road leading from the Parsonage to the creek, the potato she was preparing dropped with a splash in the pan underneath; she wiped her hands upon the roller-towel, tore off her checked apron and tied on a white one in frantic haste. One might have fancied it was her own sweetheart she met at the door, so irregular was her breathing, so sanguine her complexion.

"You needn't say a word! Your eyes speak for you!" she ejaculated after one glance. "I'm that thankful I could fall upon my knees on this very spot and shout 'Hallelujah! Come in! Sit there in the arm-chair and get your wind. You needn't have walked so fast. Good news'll keep. I knew, the minute I saw you on the other side of the bridge, how it had turned out. When you went away from here, you used your cane to walk with, like any other man would. When you come back, you swung it high. There's a great deal in the way a man carries his cane. Yours gave you away—clean and entirely."

There was no stopping her until the talk ran itself down with a final gasp.

Will Corlaer laughed as he seldom laughed—a merry outburst as spontaneous as her garrulity. He was graver than most men of his age, and never voluble—a marked contrast to his sisters.

“Don’t be too sure!” he cautioned, when she let him speak. “So far as matters have gone, it’s all right. She did not pretend not to be glad to see me. In fact she said it was ‘good to feel she had a friend near her whom she could depend upon.’ When she saw I was shocked to see how thin and changed she was, she began to comfort *me*. What other would have thought of it? She begged me ‘not to worry about her. I must get back my strength’ and so on, until I stopped her. She let me have my say out then. But! a fellow can’t talk about such things even to his best friends!”

“Of course not, and you needn’t!” encouraged Patsey. “So long as it’s all come out right, it’s nobody’s business how it was done. If she didn’t say ‘No,’ nothing else matters much.”

“She did not say ‘No,’ ” rejoined the suitor, slowly. “But it was not all plain sailing. As I had expected, she made a stand upon the old subject—the opposition of my family. When I told her, once for all, that it was played out, *what do you think she brought up next?* She says she ‘is too wicked to marry anybody.’ Did you ever hear such stuff?”

Patsey joined in the laugh, but less heartily than if the memory of the near-tragedy of last night had not been fresh in her mind.

Aloud, she said—“The silly child! If we were all half as good, we’d be ripe for the Kingdom. And what did you say to that?”

He was serious enough now. “I told her that, if she were the wickedest sinner in the universe, I shouldn’t love

her a bit less. That, if she would marry me, I'd take her to have and to hold so long as we both should live. She did not speak for a minute. Then a beautiful little smile lighted up her face, and she said, putting her hand in mine of her own accord—‘I wouldn’t believe any other man who said that, Will Corlaer! I really believe you mean what you say?’ Then, she went on, as solemnly as if she was repeating the marriage ceremony—‘When I am stronger and you are stronger, we will talk all these things over, as we can’t to-day. And then if you still want me,—and if your father will consent——’

He broke off there, jumped up and strode over to the window. Patsey gazed at his back with loving, pitying eyes. His shoulders heaved; the hands hanging at his side were clenched. She opened her mouth, and then brought the jaws together with a click like the fall of a rat-trap. After all, when Will should hear of it from the lips of the “sinner,” he would more than forgive the attempt to throw away the life his absence had made unbearable.

“He’ll love her all the better for it!” she reassured herself by thinking. “And, maybe, when it comes to the scratch, she won’t let on a word of it anyhow.”

Will wheeled abruptly upon her. “I tell you, Patsey, I felt like a devil when I listened! If she is a *sinner*, what am I?”

He turned back to the window. This was getting tragic. Without quite comprehending the change of scene, Patsey felt the time had arrived for a diversion. She chuckled at a funny recollection:

“You two foolish children remind me of what I heard a man say about St. Paul’s calling himself ‘the chief of sinners.’ He said, ‘I think that was real *conceited* in

St. Paul!" " the chuckle waxing into a guffaw. "You can tell her that story when she begins to mourn over her sins. Brag a bit about yourn!"

The witticism fell flat. He gave no sign of having heard it. Leaving his outlook, he gathered gloves, hat and stick, and held out his hand:

"I must go! My mother was out on the porch just now, looking up the road. For me, no doubt. By the way, I have been thinking of your advice as to telling her first, and letting her break the blow to my father. It would be cowardly, as I look at it. I never saw her so wrought up over any subject as she was when I told her, a year ago, that I meant to marry Sarah Van Dyck if she would have me. She is so happy at having me at home and alive that I won't ruin her comfort by making her my mouthpiece. Don't interrupt me!" He spoke fast, and with a hardening of every lineament which imparted the curious resemblance to the father he was planning to defy. "My mind is made up. She shall have one peaceful night. George Adrain—you know he is engaged to Carrie?"

Patsey assented by a nod.

"A very nice young chap, he seems to be, too. I am glad she has chosen a decent fellow *this* time. George Adrain—as I was saying, will be in to supper, and I won't be a kill-joy. This afternoon, I am to have a business-talk with my father—give an account of my stewardship, and all that. I can't make such a brilliant showing as he is likely to get from my other brother-in-law that-is-to-be when he comes home. But it will be fair enough to put him into a good humour for twenty-four hours. To-morrow morning, I shall spring the mine—and take the consequences!"

Patsey was fondling his hand between her calloused

palms. She clutched it now, hard and fast, and gazed imploringly into his eyes:

"My own dear boy! Don't do anything rash! Your father is a good Christian, but he has the temper of the old Harry himself. He loves your mother, faithful and true, with every drop of blood in his body. But he's had so much to do with iron all his life—" a miserable effort to be jocose—"seems to me, sometimes, some of it's got into his heart and blood. If anybody can coax him out of a notion, *she can!* You are the dearest creature in the world to her. I mind how my mother, who was with her when you were born, told me the poor lady put her hands together when she was told 'twas a boy, and her smile, they said, was like a light from heaven—and called out—'*I have gotten a man from the Lord!*' It would just kill her if so be you and he was to quarrel. Don't make him madder'n you can help! And another thing! Sarah's father ain't overly well-off, and if your father turns you out of the house, who's goin' to support her and you! You've got to consider all these things."

He wrested his hand from her grasp and pulled on his glove. His features were set in the likeness which, somehow, made her blood run cold, but his tone was gentle:

"I have thought of it, dear old friend! You may not know that my grandmother's will left me twice as much of her property as my sisters have. I have my father's and my grandfather's name. We would not be rich. Neither would we be poor. You may be easy upon another point! I shall do my best to persuade my father to be reasonable and just to the son who has been dutiful to him always—except in the question of my life-long happiness. I promise you this."

His expression softened strangely. For the first time in his life, he bent down and kissed her cheek:

"Good-bye, Patsey, dear! Whatever happens, *you* have done your duty. By the way, Sarah will spend a few days with Mrs. de Baun. It would do her good to see you when you can run in. Mrs. de Baun charged me not to forget to tell you."

Through the end-window, Patsey saw him cross the road and enter the gate to his home. Cold though it was, stately Mrs. Corlaer, wrapped in a shawl, her silver hair shining like an aureole, met her boy upon the porch and took him in her arms, regardless of possible observation.

Patsey sank into her rocking-chair and cried out her misgivings into the clean white apron.

If Mrs. Corlaer had apprehended unhappy results from the interview, her fears were dissipated before the family met about the supper-table. Her husband informed her, in the few moments they found for a private consultation, that "the boy had really rendered a more than tolerably satisfactory account of the business-trip."

"I am beginning to have hopes of him," was the conclusion of the colloquy. "Always supposing he does not hamper himself by an ill-judged marriage. It is a hopeful sign that he did not rush around to see that girl as soon as he got home."

He put his arm about his wife in saying it, and kissed her forehead. Both comprehended that the relief and thankfulness were mutual.

The evening meal was enlivened by the presence of a self-invited guest.

It was Rhoda Brouwer's turn to "manage" the monthly entertainment at the Guard House. It was her idea that the old name should be retained.

"It couldn't be improved," she had declared at a business meeting of the "Social Circle." "It is really the

best guard we could have against dissipation and all that, don't you know? I move, Mrs. Chairman, that the place we hope will make us happy and good, be known still as "the Guard House."

She could be as impressive as her father when she chose. To a Committee of six—three matrons and three unmarried members of the "Social Circle"—was assigned the duty of arranging a special "affair" once a month. The Guard House was open every evening for the use of all who cared to lounge in the cheerful precincts for an hour or two. Mrs. Walker kept it tidy and cool in summer, tidy and warm in winter. Picknickers in summer, sleighing- and skating-parties in winter, might gather there as the starting-point of expeditions, and return for a supper ordered for the occasion.

Rhoda had worked "like a beaver" as she phrased it, all the afternoon, run home to dress at six o'clock and then run into the Corlaers' for supper.

"It is absolutely necessary to be on the ground early," she continued to run on at the table. "I told Mrs. Walker to send for me if she wanted advice or anything else. I knew I could take the liberty with you, Mrs. Corlaer, and there are hundreds of things I must consult the girls about before the curtain rises. I have a musical programme for the first part of the evening. *No, Margarita!*" pointedly, and humorously—"‘Mary of Argyle’ is *not* among the songs! You must know, Mr. Adrain, that I made an awful *faux pas* in September by singing that song. You have heard it, of course? The *very* sweetest thing ever written! Everybody applauded at one end of the room. Nobody moved a hand at the other end, and when I looked over there to see, why, there, *if* you please, was Miss Margarita Corlaer dissolved in tears, and half-a-dozen women snivelling in sympathy!"

'And each of the half-dozen made it her business to tell me, afterward, that I might have known better than to select a song which Mr. Lang introduced to us. He sang it like a seraph, I will admit. And it was rank presumption in me to attempt it."

Mr. Adrain responded gallantly to forestall Margarita's blushes:

"I have no doubt *you* sang it like a cherub, Miss Brouwer."

Carrie gave a little squeal of delight. "Thank him, Margarita, for the pretty speech! I wonder, by the way, *who* does most of the singing in heaven—seraphs or cherubs? Does anybody know?"

"Shakespeare tells us that—

"The smallest star—
In his motion, like an angel, sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim"—

quoted Mr. Corlaer, and his wife smiled brightly.

He must be in a most genial mood when he took part in the young people's nonsense.

"From that we might infer that the cherubim are listeners, and the seraphim are musicians"—she followed his lead. "So you were right, Rhoda."

If consideration for Margarita moved them to biddenage, they might have spared themselves the effort. She struck in now spiritedly:

"I don't care if you *do* make fun of me, Mr. Adrain."

"George!" corrected her sister. "How would you like to have me call Norman, Mr. Lang!"

"George, then!" and the newly-affianced bowed his acknowledgments. "I leave it to you if it was not enough to make me cry, to hear that song when the person who

was always associated in my mind with it, was three thousand miles away."

"And he far away on the billow," chanted the irrepressible Carrie.

The laugh that greeted the taking-down of sentimentality was checked by a surprising apparition.

Saucy Van Dyck projected herself through the doorway and marched directly up to the master of the house:

"*Baby!*" she croaked in her harshest tone. "Got her? No?" Sweeping the company with a comprehensive glare, she fixed it upon Mr. Adrain, and passed to Carrie's frightened face.

"Smerden? *No!*" she vociferated, levelling a bony finger, first at one, then the other of the pair. "*Baby! where?*" A string of gibberish ensued, rising to a shriek.

She looked like one of the Eumenides in her long black cloak and hood pushed back from a mop of grizzled hair. Mrs. Corlaer laid a soothing hand upon the excited woman's shoulder, but her son anticipated her.

"Miss Saucy!" he said, firmly and kindly. "Come with me, and I will show you where she is."

At the moment of her entrance he had given a rapid order to the butler, unobserved by any one excepting his mother who supposed he wished to clear the room of the gaping servants.

"Yes!" he proceeded, in reply to the wild stare fixed upon his calm face. "I will go with you, and find what you want. Come!"

It was apparent that she connected Carrie and her lover with the loss of her darling. Yielding reluctantly to the gentle force impelling her toward the door, she never took her eyes from the girl.

"Steal her? Kill you!" she snarled through her teeth.

"Never mind her! She is all right! Come with me!" persisted Will, good-humouredly.

Besides Adrain, and possibly Rhoda Brouwer, there was no one present who did not divine that the distraught mind associated Carrie with the scene in the woods of many months ago. She could not formulate, verbally, her thought that, having saved the girl from Smerden, she had a right to expect aid from the family in her frenzied quest for her child. Carrie subsided, faintly, into her lover's arms, as Will succeeded in getting the intruder into the hall and shutting the door.

Mr. Corlaer followed them.

Even in the moment of intense excitement, it may be that he scented the danger of letting his son meet the Van Dycks.

"Well done, my boy!" he whispered in his ear. "But I will see her home! She is always tractable with me!"

"My buggy is at the door, sir! I ordered it as soon as I saw her. I will drive her home, and see that there is no further disturbance." He was composed enough to add, smilingly: "I was always in her good books. Come, *Aunty!*"

Wilhelmus Corlaer scowled, as a grin overspread Sauchy's visage. She had caught the sense of the last remark. Without a struggle, she allowed father and son to dispose of her in the carriage and tuck the fur rug about her knees. Will climbed in after her and took up the reins. His father had a last warning:

"You will not stay long?"

"I shall not, sir! Say as much to mother!"

If Mr. Corlaer had tarried in the porch until the carriage passed out of the gate, he might have queried why it took the longer road to the Van Dyck homestead. It was half-a-mile further to go by the church. Will spoke

but once on the way down-hill. That was in answer to the clutch upon his arm and the guttural—"Wrong!"

"She is at the Parsonage, Aunty!"

He had used the word, advisedly, in coaxing her to leave the house, and counted wisely upon its effect now. It was Sarah's name for her. To the nephews she was "Aunt Sauch!" when they had occasion to address her.

As a rule, they rarely troubled themselves to notice her, unless to bid her as "*You, there!*" perform some household task. It was literally true, Will reflected now, with a pain at heart, that not a human creature cared whether she lived or died, with one solitary exception. With the compassionate ache, went the unuttered—"God bless her!"

It was a relief that the Dominie himself opened the door. Rebecca Jane was fortunately dressing up-stairs to take her daughter to the Concert at the Guard House. Awed by the silence of the two men who had exchanged meaning glances, but never a syllable, Sauchy stood with Will in the chilly front-parlour where there was no light, save what fell through the door from the hall-lamp, while Mr. de Baun prepared his wife and guest for the meeting.

With the tact that never deserted her, the mistress of the manse sent Sauchy alone into the room where her niece awaited her. Those without heard a cry, as of a wild animal who finds her missing young, and Sarah's cooing tones. Then the murmur of her tender voice in reassuring pleading.

"It's all right now!" Will turned to his companions. "I promised that she should go home, and she must! She probably ran away without being missed. Knowing Sarah to be with you, they will look for Miss Sauchy here,

the first thing. If you will get your buggy up, we will take them both back. She will not leave here without her niece. And there is no time to be lost. They may miss her at any minute."

The three women went up to Sarah's room to pack her clothes in the valise in which the Dominie had brought them that morning. Rebecca Jane could be heard in the third story, carolling, to the tune of "Christmas"—

"Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve,
And press with vigour on!"

The energetical lilt bore witness to the height *her* spirit had attained. Her mistress only congratulated herself that the melody selected was not in a minor diminuendo. The two travellers were cloaked and hooded, and in the lower hall, when the Dominie announced a change of passengers:

"Miss Sauchy will go with me! She knows my horse," as he might address a timid child. "Will, you will see that Sarah gets home safe. Drive in front of us. Then we'll be sure you're *there!*"

The jolly accent and friendly hold of her arm appeased Sauchy's suspicion that her "Baby" might still elude her. Mrs. de Baun bade her an affectionate farewell, and thanked her for coming to see her.

"You must stay longer next time!" she added. Her murmur to Sarah, in the embrace that strained her to her bosom, was—"I shall see you again soon, dear child. I am thankful you are to have this little ride with him."

"How full the sky is of stars!" Will broke the silence by saying while they were passing the churchyard. "I think I never saw so many before, and they were never so bright!"

A cold little hand stole into that which sought it under the fur robe.

"I shall never forget what you have done to-night,—dear Will!" It was a whisper, but he got every word.

"And I can never forget *that*, my darling! You *belong* to me!"

Hearts were too full for further speech. Neither of the twain was naturally affluent in words. But the small hand lay in the fervent clasp that would not release it, all the starlit way, and it was raised to the lover's lips when they halted at the end of the short journey.

"I shall see you to-morrow, sweet one! Think of me and love me as much as you can!"

It had been arranged, before they left the Parsonage, that the Dominie should take the aunt and niece into the Van Dyck house and diplomatically smooth over the escapade of the elder. He had no scruples in making a feature of Will's escort of Sauchy to the manse, and thence of Sarah to her home. He had not held a country pastorate eight years without learning that play upon ignoble motives is not, of necessity, unworthy of a Christian minister when a right end is to be gained.

Mr. and Mrs. Corlaer were in the sitting-room awaiting their son's return. The younger members of the supper-party had been swept by Rhoda Brouwer to the Guard House.

The parents did not question verbally. Both looked the intensity of desire to know the sequel of the son's adventure.

"I drove directly to the Parsonage," he said, simply; "I knew Mr. de Baun could advise me what to do. Sarah was there. Her aunt did not know where she was, and took it into her head she had been kidnapped. The Do-

minie and I took them home. That is all I know. I did not go in, or see any of the family."

"That was wise!" rejoined the father.

The mother's look was eloquent of loving admiration.

"*Very* wise!" continued Mr. Corlaer. "We were sorry you had to go, but something had to be done—and at once. She is growing more unmanageable every day. She ought to be in an Asylum. She is a menace to the neighbourhood. I am sorry you were put to so much trouble to get her home."

"It was right that I should be, father. I felt that we owed her that much—and more!"

Mrs. Corlaer's eyes met her husband's, meaningly.

"He is right, my dear! We should thank him for doing his part to repay the poor creature for the great service she did us."

The father held out his hand, in frank cordiality:

"We thank you, my boy! And for relieving us all so cleverly and quickly from a most unpleasant position."

"And he lost his dessert!" Mrs. Corlaer interposed to lessen the strain upon both. "Chocolate trifle and sponge cake, too! just what he likes best of all sweets! I had some put aside for you. Will you come into the dining-room and get it, or have it brought in here?"

Will smiled wearily. "Neither, thank you, mother dear! I am not hungry. It has been a tiresome day for me, and I am not quite my old self, yet!"

He arose in speaking, and they noticed, as they had not before, the alteration in figure and face. He seemed to have lost vitality with weight. His flesh was flabby, his motions were languid.

"We are keeping you up when you should be in bed!" exclaimed the mother, self-reproachfully. "You shall

go up stairs this minute! Here's your candle! Knock upon the floor and I will come and tuck you in!"

With the jesting tone went a worshipful look never seen except in a mother's face. His jaded spirits revived, in coupling it with the thought of that other confessed love.

"Then I won't say 'good night' to you," he returned, and shook hands with his father. "Good night, sir! Can you give me half-an-hour to-morrow morning? There is a matter I omitted to speak of to-day. I will not detain you long."

His manner was purposely careless. His mother's rest should not be broken by vague uneasiness. He even repressed a yawn behind his lifted hand as he spoke.

"Certainly, my boy! I go up to the Forge at ten o'clock. Come to the office at nine."

The mother carried a glass of egg-nogg to her boy's room when she answered the signal agreed upon. Will lay back upon the pillow with a deep sigh of satisfaction, and wiped the creamy foam from his lips after draining the tumbler.

"There's nothing like it, the world around—when *you* make it! I don't care a fig for it unless you do. Momsie, darling!" He had her in his arms now, and was holding her close. "I am not the man your son ought to be, but I do love you with all my heart and soul! Every night when I say the prayer you taught me when I was a wee shaver, kneeling on the floor with my head in your lap, I add to it—'Thank God for the dearest, sweetest, noblest mother ever given to a sinful man!' Don't cry, dearest!" for he felt the wet cheek laid against his. "You ought to be happy to know that you have not wasted all the love and care you have lavished upon me. God will reward you for it. *I* can give nothing but love."

"I want nothing more." She raised herself to look into his eyes. "Nothing else—and to know that you are happy. I won't keep you awake now.

"But I must tell you what comfort and peace it brings to me to see you and your father upon such affectionate terms. He is very much pleased with the way you have managed the business he entrusted to you. I think it would *kill* me to see you two at variance with one another! For—" breaking through her enforced composure, she dropped upon her knees and took him in her arms—"my boy! my man I got from the Lord! *you are the core of my heart!*"

He said it over and over to himself, when she had gone, lying awake in the dark, and seeming to see the yearning in her eyes, hear the passionate cadence of her dear voice.

"I should be a hound—a *devil!* if I ever caused her a pang I could spare her!" was his last waking thought uttered aloud in the still darkness. "God helping me, that shall never be!"

CHAPTER XX

THE morrow was a red-letter day for Carrie Corlaer. She, with her mother and Margarita, was to begin the purchase of her trousseau.

"The fashions may change three times before poor dear Rita would be safe in buying dresses and wraps and bonnets," she had explained to her betrothed, the evening before, over coffee and cake in a corner of the Guard House. "Of course, there's no question about Norman's making a figure in the world. Father was talking to one of the Trustees in Princeton about him the other day. He says there's sure to be an opening for him in some University or College by the time he's ready for it. He won't be home before spring—maybe later—so it would be foolish for Rita to so much as look at fashions now. It must be *fearful* to be separated all that time!"

"I am very thankful it is different with us!" rejoined the lover in suitable phrase, and with conventional ardour. "Three months is the limit of my endurance. Three days would suit me better!"

The parents acquiesced obligingly in his desire for a brief betrothal. He was in a fair business, well-born and bred; good-looking and pleasant-tempered and indubitably in love with the daughter whose prankishness had been the source of lively solicitude ever since she was out of short frocks. It was more than they had dared to hope for that she should be taken into the shelter of

eminently respectable wife-hood and home with such dizzying swiftness.

The drive through the village that glorious autumnal day was, to Carrie, a triumphal progress. The family carriage, with colored coachman and a pair of high-stepping horses, was to convey the three ladies and Mr. Adrain to Millville, where they would take the train to New York. They made an early start, "to have a long day for shopping." So Carrie took pains to represent in apology for the seven o'clock breakfast.

"The days are getting awfully short! And the trip both ways won't leave us half the time we need."

The stream of operatives on the way to the Works, the clerks in store and post-office, the inmates of the Moshock House—the new hotel in the village—and housewives in general, were in the way of seeing the equipage roll down the turnpike, and would not be slow in learning what errand had brought the quartette abroad at the unseasonable hour.

Ambitions, manœuvres and triumph were petty—but Carrie's soul was not large.

At ten minutes of nine, Will Corlaer walked down the road toward his father's office. He was not so tall as the senior whose name he bore, yet as erect as a young pine, and he carried himself well. But it could not escape the notice of those who had known him since childhood that his step was less brisk than of old, and his over-coat hung loosely from spare shoulders. He had never been stalwart. It would be rank flattery now to call him robust.

Entering the private office without knocking, he found Dick Walker seated at a desk, a pile of letters in front of him. As he arose to greet his employer's son, Will was struck with the marvellous transformation from the

village lad into the man-of-affairs. His features had refined; his modest self-possession might have had back of it the training of years of association with men of breeding.

"Good native wood! It takes polish well!" was Will's inward comment, as he shook hands as with his equal.

"How goes it, Dick? I have not seen you since I got back. The world seems to have agreed well with you. I have had a pretty sharp turn of fever, you know."

"So we heard. My mother tells me you have pulled through the worst of it. I hope the mountain air will set you up all right again. There's no finer anywhere."

"I wish it could work upon me as it does upon you," responded Will heartily. "You are in fine shape, old man! My father says you have been a great help to him while I was away. He is a fine drill-master. A trifle strict, perhaps, but you are in a good school. It may be some weeks before I am on deck again. It is a comfort to think you are here."

Dick reddened with pleasure. Never, in all their lives, had he been addressed in such frank, friendly fashion by the young man who was his superior in age and social standing, and habitually reserved to stiffness.

With something of his mother's quick intuition, he divined instantly that her fondness for Sarah Van Dyck had to do with the altered demeanour of his companion, and liked him none the less for it.

"You are very kind to say it, Mr. Will. I shall try to deserve your good opinion."

Mr. Corlaer's entrance put an end to the colloquy. He had made his morning round of the works and given orders to the foreman in each department. It was a proverb with underlings that his eyes and ears were everywhere.

"Leave the letters where they are!" he told Dick, who would have gathered them prior to leaving the room. "We shall be out of this by ten o'clock. Then you can have the office for the day. Take your memorandum-book over to Horner. He has a list of orders you will have to attend to. My horse will be brought down at ten, sharp."

A wave of the peremptory hand dismissed the clerk. On the way out he cast a grateful look at Will. It was acknowledged as mutely.

"I would not forget that little talk for any money that could be offered me!" Dick said to his mother, that night. "It was like making acquaintance with a man who had always worn a mask until that minute."

"The boy promises well—doesn't he?" Will asked as the door closed. "You have done wonders for him, sir."

"I had fair material to work upon. Sit down! About once in five hundred times, a fellow who is dragged out of the mud turns out to be worth the pains you have taken with him. Dick Walker seems likely—so far—to be the one man. Time will prove.

"Now—I am ready to hear what you have to say."

He was not harsh. He was in an ungenial, perfunctory mood. And, although the son knew there was no invidious meaning in the allusion to heredity, it was not a propitious preface to the subject-matter of the interview.

His chair and position in the room chanced to be the same Norman Lang had occupied during the memorable interview that had changed the complexion of two lives, six months ago. The son did not know it, and the father did not give the coincidence a thought. While they talked, the wintry landscape obtruded itself upon Will's

consciousness, from time to time, with mysterious pertinacity. There was a glare of ice where the waters had spread themselves thinly over the big boulder dividing them. Beyond, the solemn hemlocks pointed spires skyward that were black against the pale-blue; the road wound between leafless groves and bare fields; the roar of the falls kept time with the thunder of machinery. The day was windless, and the dry air brought sounds from without clearly to the ears of the two. Sometimes they raised their voices involuntarily to be heard the better.

"I must ask first, sir, that you will promise to listen patiently. It is a personal matter I wish to speak of. One that concerns myself—and one other person."

It was not the preamble he had thought out in the midnight watches, and rehearsed a dozen times that morning—one that should propitiate and also prepare the judge. Recognizing his failure, he plunged, and desperately.

"Father, I am engaged to be married to Sarah Van Dyck!"

A horrible silence ensued. Silence, but for the roar of furnaces, the boom of the falls, and the beat of trip-hammers. No iron they could pound into shape, no steel that could be annealed by intensest heat, was harder than the visage growing implacable under the pleader's eyes.

"Well?" The accent rang like steel.

"Father! Don't decide against us without thinking it over!" burst forth the boy, thinking no more of choosing phrases. "I have tried to give it all up. I *can't!* She is the only woman I have ever loved. For years I have worked and worked to make her return my love. She knew how you felt toward her, and she would not listen to me. When I heard of the trouble that had come

to her, I hurried home, to try to comfort her. I have forced from her the confession—(she was too weak and broken-hearted to hold it back any longer)—that she is willing to marry me when you and my mother give your consent."

A sardonic gleam like the flicker over white-hot steel played across the listener's face.

"You expect me to believe that, if we do *not* consent, she will let you go? When you began this talk by saying you are engaged to be married! Make your two stories hold together better! You should know—dull-witted as I find you sometimes—that the circumstances which made your marriage with this—*young person!* highly objectionable in the eyes of your parents, before recent developments that have lowered her and her family yet more in the estimation of respectable people—are as formidable a barrier as ever. The mother's father was a puddler in your grandfather's foundry. John Van Dyck is a pompous ass, who has made a little money by means of impetus given to real-estate values and the trade his father—a miller!—taught him. He was too stingy, or too stupid, to do the only thing that could have raised his family in the sight of the community. Instead of educating his sons, he let them grow up with the least amount of mental training they could get from the public school.

"They are clodhoppers! nothing more or less. The mother, being ambitious for her daughter, sent her to boarding-school for a few terms, where she got a smattering of accomplishments. Don't interrupt me! You shall have your turn in good time. You comprehend as well as I do, that, but for the fact of John Van Dyck's connection with the church to which we all belong, your family and his would never have met socially. They are

our inferiors in every other respect. Yet you ask me to sanction your engagement to this—young woman! You dare to expect that your mother—your *mother!*” the repetition was a snarl of disdain—“will receive her as a daughter; that your sisters will recognise her and introduce her as their brother’s wife to their friends! They will soon have homes of their own. They cannot invite you to them.

“No! not a word yet! Sit *down!* and hear me out! I try to bear in mind that you are my only son. God help me! I have your interests at heart. Norman Lang is abroad upon business of which I told you. I will send you to join him, and have him prolong his stay in order to accompany you in the tour of Great Britain and the Continent. You may go to the East, if you will. I wish you to have every advantage that travel, and change of habits and place, can give you. When you return—cured! I will take you into partnership. If you marry a person of your own rank and breeding, you will inherit the homestead at my death, with a fortune that will enable you to keep it up and maintain the honour of the old name in the region where it has never been disgraced as you propose to disgrace it now.

“Stop! Hear the other side of the case. If you persist in this mad notion, neither your mother nor I will ever willingly meet you again. I shall leave all I possess to your sisters—when your mother and I are no more. From the hour of your marriage with Sarah Van Dyck, you cease to be my son. I will save you from yourself if I can!”

The son was on his feet, his clenched fists brandished, as at an invisible Apollyon; his face was black with fury. When he strove to speak, flecks of foam actually stood at the corners of his lips.

"Take your time!" said the father, quietly.

A pitcher of water stood upon the desk. He poured some into the glass and held it to the convulsed mouth.

"You will make yourself ill! Drink it!"

The matter-of-fact tone and action wrought unexpectedly upon the frantic youth. He knocked the glass from the father's hand, and sat down, apparently composed, pointing to the chair from which the other had risen.

"And do *you* sit down! It is *my* turn, now!" The voice was not his, but he articulated distinctly, only putting his hand once in a while to his throat where something rose and fell curiously.

"You have insulted me in every way you could think of. You have dared to imagine that I would sell my heart and soul and my honour—yes, I mean it! I have honour, and I know what I owe to it! You pretend to think I don't know what the word means. I might forgive that, but I will never, in time or in eternity, forgive you for slandering a woman who is as far above your daughters as the heavens are above the earth. One *daughter*, who would have brought shame upon the family you think so much of, if it had not been for an aunt of the girl you slander. Another *daughter*, who laid herself out to catch the school-master Sarah Van Dyck would not wipe her feet on! She could have had him twenty times over if she had wanted him. So much for your damned family pride! You will turn me out-of-doors if I marry the woman I love—will you? We will have enough to keep us out of the poor-house if you do. I have my own money, and I can make a living without your help.

"Now, let this be the end of it! I told you, in the beginning of our talk, that I had made up my mind to

marry the girl I love. You have made my determination stronger with every word you have spoken.

"I shall go to her at once, and try to persuade her to marry me to-day. Good morning! I won't waste more of your precious time in a useless dispute. And when I say 'Good morning!' it will, according to what you have said, be 'Good-bye' for all time!"

One long step put his father in his way when he moved toward the door. Mr. Corlaer's complexion had the greyish whiteness of zinc; his mouth was a tense line; his eyes were pitiless. The grip upon his son's arm was that of a vise.

"You are raving!" he uttered slowly. "I will give you time to collect your senses. Do you sit there, and think coolly for twenty minutes—" he glanced at the clock—"of what we have been discussing. I have a letter to write before I go. If, at the end of the time, you have seen no reason to change your mind, I promise you to urge you no further."

Will writhed under the compelling hand. Habit was mighty, and he had been in leading strings to this man for twenty-eight years. He struggled—but feebly.

"I am no child!" he began—

"Then behave like a man!"

Without a word, the son dropped into his chair. The father opened a desk on the other side of the room and began to write. The scratching of the pen—steady as the ticking of the clock above the writer's head—made itself heard in the tortured ears of the unwilling listener. Resting his chin in his cupped palms, his elbows upon the table, he tried to rally his wits.

It was the anguished suspense of the criminal while the judge thinks out the sentence. The fancy took hold of him for, perhaps, a quarter of the set time of waiting.

Then the Dominie's buggy, as well-known throughout the parish as the owner himself, passed between the miserable eyes and the waterfall. Mrs. de Baun was driving, and beside her sat Sarah Van Dyck. A torrent of emotions rushed over the young man's soul. As if she had told him in so many words, he comprehended the lady's motive for appearing abroad, thus accompanied. *Loyal, brave, loving friend!* She would lend the whole weight of her influence to change the tide of popular sentiment. She was Sarah's champion, and to the death! The lover's heart throbbed with mad exultation. New life coursed through his veins; he sat upright, full-armed for the final battle. He took his hat from the table as his father shut the desk-top down, kicked his chair back, and arose, glancing at the clock. It was on the stroke of ten. Will had seen the hostler driving the blooded horse used for mountain-roads up and down the road to keep him warm, for the last five minutes.

"Your horse and buggy are ready for you, sir!" he remarked, easily. He was actually smiling, and the father's wrath effervesced at the supposed insolence.

"I hope you have found your senses, young man?"

"I have never lost them, sir, except when I let you think that I might change my mind. I will not detain you. Will you shake hands?"

This was insolence—unmistakable, and rank! With a snarl of rage the father seized the offender by the collar, shook him furiously back and forth, as he might a child, and, being the taller and stronger of the two, flung him into a corner and left him there.

Dick Walker, watching from a window of the Works, waited ten minutes after his employer drove from his door up the turnpike, before returning to his office-tasks. He crossed the road leisurely, fumbling with the

papers huddled together in his hand, stopping upon the door-step to inhale breaths of the sun-filled air. Then he went in, sweeping his hand lightly over dazzled eyes to adapt them to the comparative obscurity of the interior.

And there, in the corner furthest from the entrance, lay Will Corlaer, still and senseless, the blood flowing from his mouth, and settling into a pool upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

MY *soirée musicale* last night was a Big Success!" Rhoda Brouwer had boasted at the breakfast-table. Her father grinned.

"That's what you call it? Go on! I like to keep up with the new things. Maybe you wouldn't mind putting it into English."

"It means 'musical evening,' father," rejoined the daughter, dutifully. He liked to hear her air her French. He had risen to his present eminence by keeping pace with the march of improvement. He might be marking time now, but he was ever ready for a start.

"The other name sounds better!" with a commendatory gesture. "I must practise it against the next blow-out. I suppose Will Corlaer wasn't well enough to be on deck?"

Rhoda screamed with laughter.

"He was on escort-duty! The funniest thing happened at supper! I was waiting until you were all at the table before I told it!"

It did not lose one grotesque feature under her manipulation, and gained several. Timothy O. listened with increasing soberness.

"Too bad! too bad!" he ejaculated at the close. "That woman will do mischief yet if she is not kept in. No person who hasn't the command of his senses is harmless. The head-doctor in an Insane Asylum told me that once. I must drop Van Dyck a hint."

"Mrs. Van Dyck couldn't spare her!" put in practical Ruth. "She is the most useful person in that house. I don't believe she would ever hurt a fly. If a dog or cat is hurt or ailing, she is as tender as she would be to a sick baby. And she would lie down and die for Sarah. I never saw such idolatry."

"She needs it all!" observed the maiden aunt at the head of the table. "Cynthia was telling me that that wretched Case has been seen in Millville lately, and that Jo Scheffelin is on the look-out for him. He swears he will shoot him at sight!"

"Bah!" sneered her brother. "He couldn't hit a barn-door when he's sober, let alone when he has a 'drunk' on. Not but what the rascal deserves a load of buck-shot!"

The entrance of the butler with a relay of hot buckwheats checked the flow of scandal. The principle that it is not safe to discuss one's neighbours in the presence of servants was adopted and acted upon in the household, albeit, as we have seen, information gleaned through subordinates was not contraband. Rhoda's appetite for a bit of racy gossip was as keen as that of the *bourgeois* villager whose daily meat and drink it was. It might, or it might not, have had weight in her plans for the forenoon. As she put the case in the subsequent table-chat, it was expedient that some responsible person should drive to the Guard House to bring back a hamper of borrowed china which had been used in the collation succeeding the *soirée musicale*. Anticipating an unusually large attendance, the Brouwers—always liberal—had contributed plates, saucers, and tumblers to accommodate the overflow of revellers. She would take Cynthia along to lend a hand to Mrs. Walker in clearing up and setting to rights.

She set off, then, in the roomy family coach at a quarter of ten, and was cordially welcomed by Patsey.

“ ‘Tain’t often that I grumble at a big day’s work,” said the janitress. “ I always say ‘No loose-j’inted jobs for me! ’ But when I came in here this mornin’ by sun-up, and saw the mess they left behind ’em over night, I stood in my tracks, and said out loud—‘well, *there!*’ ”

“ You’ve made a fine beginning! ” replied Rhoda, affably. “ I see you have all my china and glass clean and ready for packing. I’ll get that out of your way.”

She prided herself, not without reason, upon her executive ability and the sound common sense that condescended to women of low estate in the discharge of homely domestic duties. Falling to work, forthwith, upon the pile of china set aside at one end of the room, she ordered Cynthia to wash the dishes at the other.

“ Mrs. Walker will help me here! ”

The combined clatter of dish-pan and china-packing effectually covered the query, uttered close to Patsey’s ear:

“ Is it true that Case Van Dyck is hanging about the neighbourhood? ”

Patsey shook a meaning head:

“ The Lord only knows! I did hear that Tom Romeyn had seen him in Millville, and that he slunk away, without speakin’ to him. But, law, dear! you can’t depend upon one-hundredth part of what you hear. I wish, for my part, that he wouldn’t ever show his face in these parts again! Jo Scheffelin’s a dangerous customer when he gets mad, and he’s made threats. There’s more towels on the line over there, Cynthia! I washed all I could lay hands on yesterday, knowin’ we would need a lot.” Sinking her voice, she took up the broken thread: “ Some things are past findin’ out. I can’t see, for the life o’ me,

why *par-ents* should be made to suffer for their children's faults. It's like readin' the Commandments backward—this visitin' the sins of the children upon the fathers. Shan't I lift that to the carriage?"

Rhoda restrained her: "No! Cicero will drive up and down until I call him. There's no hurry! I told you to take home what provisions were left. Did you?"

"You may be sure I did, Miss Rhoda, and I was thankful to be saved the trouble of doin' much cookin' to-day. Dick and me breakfasted upon sandwiches, and there's plenty for supper, to say nothin' of cake and biscuits. Don't seem right, though, for me to have so much when there's maybe some that go hungry every day."

"Don't distress yourself to look for them. The left-overs are your perquisites, and we would all rather you had them than some worthless loafer. Was there enough chocolate?"

"An' a potful left over! I heated it up for breakfast, seein' it wouldn't be good for next month."

Rhoda laughed good-humouredly. "If it could have been kept over, you would have done it. You are the most economical woman I ever saw. Ah, Cicero! I was about to call you! Take this out to the carriage!"

The coloured coachman stood in the doorway, hat off and mouth open for a chance to interject his word. He panted it out now:

"Yes, Miss Rhody! but if you please, ma'am, Mr. Will Corlaer is awful sick down at the Works, and Dr. Ten Eyck, he stopped me as I was drivin' 'long the road, and ast me if he mought be brought home in the carriage."

All three women were outside of the door and gazing down the turnpike before he finished speaking. It stretched straight to the office, and they could see a crowd of operatives and other men about the door.

"Certainly! You needn't have waited to ask me?" answered the young mistress. "Drive back as fast as you can go, and bring the doctor, too!"

She turned to Patsey who had instinctively torn off her checked apron. Her rubicund complexion had faded to the sallowness of the dishcloth in her hand.

"And they all went to the city this morning—didn't they?" Rhoda ejaculated, rapidly. "Carrie told me last night they were going. Mr. Corlaer went by a little while after I got here, on his way to the Forge, I suppose.

"*You* ought to go right over to the house! I will go with you. Cynthia! do you stay here and finish what you are doing. If I want you, I will send for you."

She was in her element. A sensation—a situation—and a chance to take the centre of the stage!

With whirlwind rapidity and wondrously little bustle she got herself and Patsey into the Corlaer house, appointed to the terrified servants their respective tasks in the preparation for the injured man, and helped Patsey re-make the bed in which he should be laid as soon as he arrived.

So swift and well-concerted were her movements, and so deliberate the stages of removing Will into the carriage, to be supported there by the doctor and Dick Walker, that she and her assistants were at the front gate in time to witness the approach of the sad little procession. The day was still; the carriage was driven very slowly, and not a word was spoken by the line of work-men and stragglers trailing behind it. The click of hoofs upon the frozen road, the rumble of wheels and the shuffle of a hundred feet had the rhythm of a funeral march; the distant thud of the trip-hammer rose and fell like the beat of a muffled drum. The most careless

and the least imaginative spectator bowed in spirit before the solemnity of scene and moment. For a half-century to come, it would be the theme of stories that wrought traditions of the Valley into dramatic history.

“They say as how 'twas Dick Walker what sent for the doctor and stopped Mr. Brouwer's carriage for to fetch him home!”

The loud whisper from the group of servants reached Patsey's ear. In the depth of her affliction (and it exceeded the grief of any one else there) she resented the familiar use of her boy's name. She turned upon the unwary whisperer and hissed back a retort:

“If *Mr.* Walker has charge of matters, all will be done right! You may be sure of that!”

Dick and the three men from the mill brought the inanimate figure into the house, the doctor bringing up the rear. Dick and his mother undressed Will after he was laid upon the opened bed. It was Rhoda who dispersed the waiting crowd, awhile later. Walking briskly down to the gate, she raised her hand, as from the rostrum:

“My good friends! will you kindly go away, now? Mr. Corlaer is in a very dangerous state. He must be kept perfectly quiet. As soon as the doctor has examined him, word will be sent to the Works of his condition. I know you are anxious about him. I know, too, how much we all love him. That is why I am begging you to give him a chance to recover. Good-bye!”

She sent a smile and a wave of the hand after the scattering throng. She had composed on the way down-stairs what should be said to them, and had played her part well.

“I was born for emergencies!” she said at dinner, to her appreciative relatives. “I promised Patsey that I would go back late this afternoon, to be there when Mrs.

Corlaer and the girls get home. They expected to take the train that stops at Millville at four-forty. The carriage was left in town all day to meet them at the dépôt for that train. I saw Patsey dreaded to break the news to them, and I offered to do it."

"You are braver than me!" rejoined her father. "I wouldn't undertake the job for a farm with a hen on it. Corlaer told the men that he wouldn't be home before ten o'clock. The moon will be up then. The Dominie will see to *him*! I talked with Ten Eyck this afternoon. He considers the boy in a very bad way. It'll be a hard blow to Corlaer. That's the disadvantage of having an only son."

Tone and countenance testified to his self-gratulation upon having managed his succession more wisely.

After all the thought and time bestowed by Rhoda upon the composition and rehearsal of the speech which was to soften to Mrs. Corlaer the tidings of her son's misfortune, fate ordained that she should not be the medium through which the sorrowful truth percolated to the mother.

Intent upon completing the day's tasks so sadly interrupted, Dick Walker repaired to the office in mid-afternoon, and strove to concentrate his thoughts upon the letters to be copied into one of the bulky volumes that, in epistolary form, told the history of the Business from the day Wilhelmus Corlaer became the head. Not a letter pertaining to it, written in that office, was mailed before it was carefully transferred to the big books.

"When I am gone, you will find all that I have done—and tried to do—written down there in black-and-white," he had told his son.

Dick felt it to be an honour when he was trusted to handle the sacred pages.

He had covered several pages with clerkly characters when a knock at the door prefaced the entrance of Dr. Ten Eyck and Mr. de Baun. The latter explained the intrusion in a few sentences. It was desirable that they should acquaint themselves thoroughly with all the circumstances attendant upon Mr. Will Corlaer's attack. It was not, in Dr. Ten Eyck's opinion, a fainting-fit consequent upon a weakened condition caused by his recent illness. He must learn the particulars of the seizure so far as Dick knew them.

The doctor spoke next. He was the tallest and thinnest man in three townships. Straight as a lath, standing six-feet-four in his stockings, he carried not one ounce of superfluous flesh. His bushy hair was iron-grey; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and never used a monosyllable when a polysyllable was available. His voice made up in rotundity what his figure lacked, and was set by nature to sesquipedalian measures.

"Our estimable pastor has conveyed my desire in apt phraseology, my dear young friend," he began. "Mr. Wilhelmus Corlaer, Junior's condition is alarmingly precarious. The hemorrhage was caused, I apprehend, by the rupture of one of the minor blood-vessels in the region of the pericardium. Or in the apex of the lungs. It is not in itself alarming except as it may be symptomatic. A violent fall might have occasioned the rupture. Or a severe paroxysm of coughing. I discern no crepitation that would indicate weakness of the respiratory apparatus. I might opine that the unfortunate young gentleman had slipped upon the floor and brought his head into violent contact with the wall, causing concussion of the brain, did not his extreme emaciation and consequent loss of weight render the hypothesis comparatively untenable. Still, it is sustained in part by

the discovery of a contusion of moderate dimensions upon the left side of the cranium. Will you kindly state to us, Mr. Walker, the precise circumstances of your entrance into the office, and indicate the exact position of the—ah! I would say young Mr. Corlaer?"

"Tell us where he was lying, and how he lay!" Mr. de Baun could hold his peace no longer. "And how you happened to be the one to find him?"

The early twilight was not far off, but there was light enough from the window to show the youth's grave, honest face.

Misgivings as to ulterior motives the physician's prolix address might have awakened in the mind of a more sophisticated hearer, found no lodgment there. Unconsciously, the Dominie heaved a mighty sigh.

"I don't wonder you feel bad, Dominie!" said innocent Dick. "I have been unstrung all day by it. Mr. Corlaer had ordered me to copy some letters this forenoon. I was at work upon them when Mr. Will came in. He and I talked together for perhaps three minutes before Mr. Corlaer got here. He sent me over to the Works on an errand that kept me there for more than half-an-hour. He had told me he was going to the Forge at ten o'clock, and that I was to come back here when he had gone. I saw his horse and buggy drive up to the door, and he got in and drove up the road. Supposing Mr. Will would go away too, I waited for five minutes or so, before I came back to the office. I found Mr. Will lying over there, his head against the wall and the blood running from his mouth. He lay upon his left side with one arm under him. I took hold of him and found he was in a fit of some kind. Then I ran over to the Works and told Jake Wills to run for you. It so happened that he had seen you go into the post-office a short time before,

and he got you at once. You gentlemen know what was done after that."

"You are positively assured in your own mind that no person entered the office subsequent to the departure of the senior Mr. Corlaer, and prior to your entrance?"

"Nobody could have got in without my seeing him. I was on the look-out at the window over there," pointing to the building opposite.

"And you are not aware that any individual entertained animosity against the injured gentleman?"

"I don't believe he has an enemy in the world, doctor! Not in this part of it, certainly."

"May I inquire into the nature of the brief dialogue you say was held by you and him, anterior to the entrance of Mr. Corlaer, Senior? Was it amicable?"

Dick smiled broadly.

"Very friendly, sir. He was kind enough to say that his father liked my work, and I thanked him. We did not speak more than three or four sentences."

"He evinced no symptoms of jealousy at his father's partiality?"

Dick's smile was an irrepressible laugh.

"Excuse me, doctor! but the idea is ridiculous. He was more pleasant than I had ever seen him before."

The Dominie clapped the lad upon the shoulder.

"I am sure of it, my dear boy! And just as sure that you are a thoroughly good fellow. We thought it well—the doctor and I—to be able to answer any questions fools might ask about a matter that is perfectly simple to any reasonable man—or woman! You have done your duty throughout. I guarantee that you will continue to do it. I am thankful your mother has poor Will in charge. He couldn't have a more skilful or tender nurse. Good day! I hope we haven't taken up too much of your time?"

CHAPTER XXII

THREE goes the long and the short of it!" said a village wag, when the Dominie and the doctor walked past the post-office. "Dominie de Baun isn't, so to speak, a small man. Alongside of the doctor he makes you think of the church and the steeple."

"They are talkin' very earnest!" was the observation of another lounger. "I see 'em come out of Corlaer's office. Most likely, they're goin' over Will's case. If he dies, I s'pose there'll likely be a coroner's jury?"

"The very thing I would avert!" the pastor was saying at that moment. "It is as clear as noon-day to you and to me, that young Walker is as innocent as either of us of any fault in the affair. It would be a positive grief to me were a breath of suspicion directed toward him. He is doing his bravest to live down the odium cast upon him by a single misdeed. As Christian men, you and I should help him in the fight. If Will Corlaer came to hurt by the hand of any man, it was not he. He told the story like the honest fellow I know him to be. I have had my eye upon him for a year, and I know what I am talking of. With the evidence before us, I suggest, my dear doctor, that we keep our own counsel, and shut out Dick Walker from mind and speech in connection with the accident. A whisper implicating him, however remotely, with it, would be absolute ruin—absolute ruin, sir! and to an innocent man.

"Your examination was thorough, and allow me to say,

my dear friend, most tactfully conducted. He had no inkling of your object in questioning him. Another man might have bungled the case and brought grievous trouble upon the guiltless boy and his worthy mother."

The Dominie could be impressive when put upon his mettle. He could likewise be diplomatically artful—in a righteous cause.

Left to himself, Dick devoted two minutes to speculation upon what he regarded as superfluous anxiety on the part of his late visitors to secure details that could have no bearing upon the illness of a man newly-recovered from typhoid and worn-out by travel. Will Corlaer was always rather a weakly fellow, and he had miscalculated his strength. But Dr. Ten Eyck, capital doctor as he was, had always a touch of "Fuss-and-feathers" about him.

The clerk chuckled in returning to the letters and the big book. It was growing dark. He lighted the lamp hanging over the desk, and fell diligently to work.

The twilight without was thickening into gloom when the door at his back flew open, and Carrie Corlaer's shrill voice called—

"Daddykin! Will! Oh, it's *you!*!" The change of intonation was ludicrously abrupt. "Where are they?"

Dick was on his feet—respectful to the daughter of his employer, but not a whit daunted by the imperious damsel.

"Mr. Corlaer has not come back from the Forge. Mr. Will"—he hesitated, then took a sudden resolution—"Is Mrs. Corlaer out there?" motioning toward the open door.

"Of course she is! Where else should she be? We saw the light through the window (you ought to close

the blinds!) and thought we'd take the one of them who happened to be here, home in the carriage.

"Mother! there's nobody here but Dick Walker! Father hasn't got back and Will—where did you say he is?"

Dick was at the other side of the carriage. He spoke with grave respect to Mrs. Corlaer who sat upon the back seat.

"I am sorry to tell you, madam, that Mr. Will was taken ill this morning in the office, and is still in bed. Dr. Ten Eyck has seen him, and my mother is with him. We hope it is nothing serious."

In her excitement Mrs. Corlaer laid her hand upon that resting upon the carriage door.

"Ill! how did it happen? Who was with him? Are you sure it is not serious?"

"He was alone in the office. Mr. Corlaer had left a little while before. I came in from the Works, and found him—quite ill!"

He suppressed particulars. Enough had been said to prepare her for the truth.

"A very odd story!" cried pert Carrie. "Drive on, Cicero! We will know the truth when we get home."

Even Mrs. Corlaer had not presence of mind to thank him for trying to soften the shock. The carriage whirled away, leaving him standing in the road.

"It will be bad enough as it is!" muttered he, shutting himself in with his tasks. "From the way that girl spoke you might have thought I was to blame for the bad news. It was none of *my* doing!"

Which was precisely the conclusion at which Dominie and doctor had arrived an hour earlier.

It was a stricken household to which Mr. de Baun paid a visit at nine o'clock. He had called on his way

home to supper, and heard in what manner the news of her son's illness was communicated to the mother. She was then so nearly her wonted self as to beg him to tell Dick how she appreciated the delicacy and feeling with which he had acted.

"I am afraid I may have seemed ungracious," she added. "But the shock and anxiety were severe."

She came down-stairs to receive him at the later visit. The stress of the past three hours had told upon her physically, but her demeanour was normally serene, and she was inclined to be hopeful of Will's ultimate recovery. He had fever and had not recovered full consciousness.

"But I am sure he recognised me when I spoke to him. He put up his lips to kiss me, and murmured something. Patsey Walker tells me it was the first sign of intelligence he has showed since he was brought in.

"I am very grateful to you for offering to meet his father when he gets home. This will be a terrible blow to him. They have enjoyed one another's society lately more than ever before. You have assured me often that they would understand each other, as time went on." She faltered and forced down rising emotion. "I thank God that it has come to pass. I have never confessed to you or to your wife, who is my dearest friend, the agony of my desire that the two whom I loved more than all the world beside, should be in entire sympathy—the father and son. Both are so noble—so altogether worthy—that they must, in time, be as intimate as I wish.

"Did Mr. Corlaer tell you how well Will transacted the business that took him away? It made me blissfully happy to see how proud he is of his son."

The pastor let her run on in this strain until the full

heart was unburdened. She had never spoken so freely until now of the anguish that wrung the faithful heart at the reserve of the son toward his father, and the harsh judgment of the father of his only boy. The crucial hour of a common sorrow had unclosed the fountain sealed heretofore by loyalty to her best-belovèd. The king—and the prince—could do no wrong.

Edward de Baun's wife sometimes called him "Bar-nabas"—the Son of Consolation. He demonstrated his right to the title now by gently leading his patient on to talk of her boy's affection for her, his exemplary conduct in college and in business-life; the kind acts and words that won him the affection of certain "mountain-families," who had told the pastor of benefactions Will had never confided to his mother. As to the temporary misunderstanding between him and the father, nothing was more common. It was a proverb that fathers were intolerant of their sons' foibles and indulgent to their daughters' faults.

"My own father and I were never comrades until I was out of college, and old enough to enter into the feelings of a full-grown man"—he was saying when the tramp of hasty feet upon the veranda heralded the master's return.

Again the well-concerted scheme that would have led up gradually to the revelation of the disaster had been frustrated by apparent accident.

Five miles from home, Mr. Corlaer was met by an officious countryman, who halted him in the road and poured out the tale he had picked up at the village store, of the illness which had befallen the listener's son and the fatal consequences predicted by the physician.

Something of what the father had endured in the reckless drive over those last five miles, was branded for life

upon the haggard visage that met the startled eyes of wife and friend as the door flew open.

“Is he *dead?*”

Heedless of the loving arms cast about him and the wife’s disclaimer—“No, my darling! no!” he looked over her head at the pastor:

“Tell me the truth! Tell me the worst! She would keep it from me! Have I killed him?”

The son of consolation deftly withdrew the crazed man from the clinging embrace, and held him fast by both shoulders:

“Are you crazy, man? He is alive, and, please God, may live for many years. Compose yourself, and you shall go up to see him. Just now you would scare him out of his wits. Mrs. Corlaer! can he have a cup of coffee before he goes to Will’s room? I don’t believe he has had his supper. I should like to have the fool that frightened him, here, for five minutes. My dear old friend! can’t you trust us to deal fairly with you?”

He got the limp figure into an arm-chair, and left him with his wife, going off himself to order the coffee.

He took so long to get it that Mr. Corlaer arose to take the cup from him with a gallant attempt at a smile.

“There’s not another man like you! I am ashamed of my behaviour. But that fellow was positive!”

“Swallow it! and forget him!” commanded the Dominie. “I have notified Patsey that she is to have a visitor. The boy is sleeping now. You may take a peep at him. Then, leave him to her. I’ll say ‘Good night,’ now that you are here to run things. I’ll be in again in the morning if you’ll let me. Send for me at any time, day or night, if I can be of use to any of you! To *any* of you!”

At half-past ten o’clock Mrs. de Baun had gone to

her room, and the Dominie, avowing himself “too much excited by the day’s happenings to think of sleep for two hours to come,”—had sought a nervine in pipe and “Pendennis,” in his quiet study. Rebecca Jane had been “visiting with” a crony since the meeting was over. It could not be reasonably expected, in view of the aforementioned “happenings,” that the conference of public-spirited women should be adjourned *sine die*, at the usual hour. The hands of the kitchen-clock scandalised the serving-woman by pointing to eleven, minus five minutes, while she was giving the test-punch of the fist to the batch of bread set for the night. In kneading she had sung and hummed by turns to the tune of *Sherman*:

“O, where shall rest be found?
Rest for the weary soul.
’Twere vain the ocean’s depths to sound,
Or pierce to either pole.”

The lilt was subdued in force. The house was quiet and the Dominie was in his study. The hall-lamp burned still. She would extinguish it the last thing before going up-stairs.

“The world can never give
The bliss for which we sigh;
’Tis not the whole of life to live,
Nor all of death to die,”

crooned the worker, fist in air, suspended for the trial-blow.

The door-bell rang so sharply that the fist never fell. “Somebody’s sick—or *something’s* happened!” ejaculated Rebecca Jane, and sped to the front door, wiping the flour from her fingers as she flew.

Yet the ring was repeated before she got there. Drawing back the bolts in terrified haste, she was nearly knocked down by a man who stalked right onward.

"I know Mr. de Baun is in. I saw the light in the study!"

He was upon the second landing in saying it, and not until then did she see that it was Mr. Corlaer.

"For the love of goodness!" gasped the mulatto, staring after him.

"Now, I *know* there's something awful the matter!"

The same thought was uppermost in the master's mind, as he answered the knock upon the study-door. Surprise made way for alarm at sight of the face disfigured almost beyond recognition.

"Mr. Corlaer! what has happened?"

The intruder threw himself into a chair, dropped his head upon the arms outstretched in abandonment of woe upon the table, and groaned:

"He is worse! he will die! I am a murderer!"

In a lightning flash, the pastor recalled the agony of the cry—"Have I killed him?" that had rent his ears earlier in the evening. As swift was the recollection of the interview between father and son of which Dick Walker had spoken. And the doctor's talk of the concussion on the head, and his conviction that a mere fall, caused by a misstep, would not have stunned and bruised one so slight of weight!

For a second his stout heart was faint with deadly sickness.

"God of mercy! have pity upon this man!"

The cry was a *De profundis*, and escaped him involuntarily.

The room was without other sound for a long minute except for the broken breaths that convulsed the form

bowed upon the table—the tearless, *terrible* weeping of a strong man—disarmed!

Then, Edward de Baun sat down beside his friend, put his arm about him, and bent to his ear:

“Mr. Corlaer! try to think and to speak coherently for a moment. I would help you if I could. God can, and He will grant grace for the hour of need. How do you know that Will is worse?”

The changed face was raised to his. The father wet the dry lips with his tongue before he could frame a word.

“Ten Eyck is there. He will stay all night. The fever is high. He is delirious. Ten Eyck gives little hope. I know there is none!”

“Neither he nor you can foretell the end. The boy is young, and he would wish to live.”

He felt the poverty of the attempt at consolation before he was interrupted by a despairing gesture:

“*Don’t!* It is worse than thrown away. I deserve all that is coming upon me. We quarrelled. I was violent. I shook him and threw him down. He was lying there when I left him. I did not know he was hurt!”

The grey head fell again upon the outstretched arms.

Dead stillness reigned throughout the study, so profound and, to the pastor’s imagination, so fraught with meaning, that he started when a log burned asunder and the brands tumbled over upon the hearth. He picked them up with the tongs and readjusted them, before replying to the confession. He was not stern in tone and bearing. He was quietly judicial, and the changed manner arrested the other’s attention.

“When you are calmer, we will talk of the various points of your statement. I incline to the opinion that, in your agitation, you exaggerate your fault in the case

you speak of. But that can wait. One thing cannot be ignored. Mrs. Corlaer must never—I would emphasize what I say—Mrs. Corlaer must *never*, under any circumstances, get so much as an inkling of the *possibility* that other than natural causes led to your son's illness! It would be the foulest wrong you could do her!"

The man before him looked up. The pastor intercepted the words quivering upon his tongue.

"I mean just what I say! To suspect it would *kill* her! You will acknowledge this when you regain composure. As you will—when the shock has passed. Keep that one thought in mind, and let other things take their course. Whatever happens, your first duty is to the *mother*!"

"You say Ten Eyck will stay all night at your house? If you will allow me, I will get my hat and overcoat, and walk along with you. I am afraid you may have caused unnecessary alarm to Mrs. Corlaer by rushing off, as you did."

The judicial tone was rebukeful. It acted upon the culprit as a dash of cold water in the face. Stammering something that may have been contritely apologetic, he followed the rapid steps that paused at Mrs. de Baun's door. There the Dominie turned his head to say—

"Wait for me down-stairs, please! I will be with you in a second!"

The hall-clock had not ticked away a minute when he joined Mr. Corlaer, and the two took their rapid way down the road.

CHAPTER XXIII

WILL CORLAER never recovered consciousness. He died upon the third day after Dick Walker found him upon the office-floor, the life-blood trickling from his lips.

The first, and one of the heaviest snows of a hard winter, had to be shovelled away from the door of the family vault on the day of the funeral, but the countryside turned out in force to fill the church whence four generations of his forefathers had been borne to their burial. His mother was unable to leave her bed. The father looked and moved like a man of eighty, in walking up the aisle, a black-robed daughter clinging to his arm. The service over, he gazed with glazed eyes, straight before him, as in a dream. At the grave his demeanour was the same. He spoke to no one even when Carrie wept aloud and hysterically, and would have sunk to the ground but for the enfolding arm of her betrothed. It was already apparent to sympathising friends that she felt herself to be especially ill-treated by fate in the catastrophe which had overtaken the prosperous household. Her wedding must be postponed, and she had ordered a thousand dollars' worth of trousseau! It was furthermore bruited abroad that Margarita was congratulated by her sister upon her better part.

“Having to go into mourning means very little to her,” she had confided to Patsey, within hearing of her maid. “She will be ready for black-and-white by the time her

wedding-day is fixed. But six of my dresses are actually in the dressmaker's hands! Misfortunes never come singly."

Patsey respected herself and "the family" too sincerely to repeat the speech, even to her Dick. Somehow it took wing, and had a flight that might have been longer had not the wind been taken out of it by more dignified gossip.

Mr. de Baun, like the true and honourable shepherd of erring souls that he was, had never intimated by word, look or significant reticence to his chief confidante and the keeper of the archives of his heart, the purport of the communication made to him in the study that November night. Rebecca Jane's self-sustained reputation for discretion put the thought of eavesdropping beyond the reach of malignant insinuation. Yet the rumour that Will Corlaer had come to his end, and at his father's hand, by violent means, crept through the Valley within a week after the vault closed upon him. Then it gathered strength and flew fast, far and wide. A mystery is to the scandal-monger like the scent of carrion to the vulture. But for the united front opposed to the evil birds—

"gathering flock-wise"—

by the Dominie and attendant physician, the foul story must have reached the sorrowful household. That it was not done was largely owing to the solid front indicated just now, partly to the respect in which the father was held in county and state, and chiefly—since the truth is not to be boggled in this veracious chronicle—to the expulsive power of a new and mightier scandal broached a month thereafter.

I condense the supposed tragedy:

Mention was made, some pages back, of a shadowy tale of the reappearance in Millville of one of the principals in the elopement which was the opening chapter in the series of soul-and-tongue-stirring events which made that winter of the early fifties forever memorable in the history of Kinapeg township. The rumor took substance when a respectable denizen of the Valley jogging along the turnpike connecting the manufacturing town and a smaller settlement "over the mountain," passed a slouching figure that, as the witness averred, "took to the woods" when he hailed him by name. The farmer recollected instantly that he had overtaken, a hundred yards or so back, the man whom Case Van Dyck had robbed of his wife, last summer. He, too, slunk out of the highway when the passer-by looked hard at him.

"I'll bet my hat he's on his track!" the farmer told his wife when he got home. "There'll be a rumpus if he overtakes him."

Hearing nothing of such an encounter in the next fortnight, he dismissed the incident from his mind.

This was some days before Will Corlaer's death. In Christmas-week, some boys, hunting rabbits in the snow, happened upon the skeleton of a man upon a hill-top six miles from Kinapeg. The snow had been blown away from the bare rock in the wild storm that filled the ravines with swirling drifts; crows and wild cats had denuded the bones of flesh wherever it was not protected by clothing. Even this had been torn away in many places by teeth and claws. The boys fled precipitately down the mountain and reported the discovery. A party of men sought the wretched wreck of a human creature and carried it down to "the store." There it lay under a tattered horse-blanket until Dr. Ten Eyck,

the county coroner, summoned a jury to sit upon it. The remains were voted to be those of "an unknown man who came to his end by means unknown to the jury. He may have been murdered by some person, or persons unknown. He may have perished from exposure to the fierce storm of December first and second."

When the undertaker, engaged by the county authorities to get the loathly thing out of sight, examined the rags left upon it, he found a handkerchief in the pocket. It was tattered and stained, except at one corner which was dingy white, and bore initials worked in black silk.

"C. V. D." read the official to his assistant, holding the remnant with disdainful thumb and finger. "Who mought that be?"

His wife was peeping in at the door, and now showed herself.

"It stands for 'Case Van Dyck' all right!" she asserted, excitedly. "I'll wash it—though I hate the job! and take it up to the Van Dycks' right away! They'll most likely want him put in their Section."

Her expectation was not fulfilled. The letters on the scrap of linen certainly resembled those wrought by Sauchy, two Christmasses agone, for her eldest nephew. Sarah grew white and sick at sight of them, yet wished to show the relic to her aunt for identification. Her mother put down the proposition with old-time energy.

"There isn't one chance in ten thousand that it's the same, and she wouldn't know it as it looks now, if so be it was. And for all we know, if it was—*his!*—it might have been lost or stolen. I won't listen to no such yarn as that what was found up there on the mountain was anybody belonging to me or mine. 'Go to see it?' What do you take me, or my husband for? No such shameful scandal was ever heard of in either of our families.

Wherever that wicked woman has taken my son, even *she* couldn't make him a tramp. What should he be doin' over there on the rocks in the cold, and he knowin' he could find bed and fire and victuals in his father's house, providin' he come back alone. Take the dirty rag away! It's an insult to fetch it to us!"

The author of the insult took back the fragment and a tale that befitted the "remains." By night, half of the Kinapeg population was morally sure that the skeleton was that of the runaway. When the story flew to the farmer who had seen the two men in the road, there was as little doubt that judgment in the form of Jo Scheffelin had overtaken the sinner.

The huddle of bones was laid away decently in the obscure corner of the churchyard belonging to the township, and Mr. de Baun, standing ankle-deep in the dirty snow thrown up by mattock and spade, read of the Resurrection and the Life, in the hearing of the motley crew attracted by vulgar curiosity to the dishonoured spot. He added a prayer for "those connected with the deceased by blood or affection."

"Be merciful to them, Our Father! Thou hast abundant compassion for the erring and the sorrowful. We are Thy children, dear Lord! Heal the broken heart, if there be one that is bereaved by the death of this, our unknown brother. And for the sake of Thy dear Son, forgive us our manifold trespasses, for we also forgive the trespasses of others. Amen!"

Jo Scheffelin, when sought for, lay dead-drunk in the house his wife had made desolate. He had not drawn a sober breath for a month, said his neighbours. There being absolutely not a straw of evidence to convict him of the murder,—if indeed violence were done upon the unidentified corpse,—he was not arrested or molested in

any way. He drank himself out of the world before spring.

“We need to establish but two things—Motive and Opportunity—to enable us to run down the guilty parties!” quoth a professional biped sleuth, after listening to my story of that benighted period. “Here, we have both. Added to these, was the evidence of one who saw the parties in suspicious proximity to one another—the hunted and the pursuer. The case might go before a jury without any other testimony.”

The Kinapeg authorities were purblind and thick-headed, judged by our standards. They proved themselves adepts in collecting and weighing testimony which satisfied ninety-nine out of a hundred as to the identity of the remains interred at the public expense, and the guilt of the wronged husband. If guilt it were? debated moralists, who yet lived fifty years before “the unwritten law” was heard of by that name. Vague rumours drifted into the Valley intermittently, for several years, of the place and doings of the village Delilah. It was pretty well established at length, that she had robbed her rustic lover of the money filched from his father, and abandoned him for a city lover, sinking finally into the foulest depths a woman can reach.

There was no social stagnation in the hill-girt village that season. It was positively metropolitan in the number and telling features of sensations vouchsafed by Providence to the winter-bound population. February was not a week old when the devoted Van Dyck family supplied yet another.

One windy night, the mill caught fire and burned to the ground. It could do nothing less, the flames having originated upon the first floor and gained the second before Sauchy, who was a light sleeper, seeing the red re-

flection upon the ceiling of her room, gave the alarm. Mrs. Van Dyck and her stalwart sister-in-law carried buckets of water from the well down the hill until they were driven back by men who had hurried from all quarters to aid in the task they felt was hopeless from the outset. The mill had been idle for a month, and the pond above the dam was frozen a foot deep. "Mr. Van Dyck had lost his ambition," was the verdict of congeners. Case was his right hand in all pertaining to the mill, and neither of the two sons left to him cared to learn the trade. The father had recovered from the numbness of limbs and tongue left by the "stroke," but never regained his pristine energy. The wife was the head of the household, and Sauchy the hands. When, therefore, the exposure and wetting of that disastrous night laid Mrs. Van Dyck low with inflammatory rheumatism, she was more intolerant than ever of Sarah's apathetic ways and listless discharge of the heavier duties cast upon her by the mother's illness.

"She hasn't been one bit like herself since Will Corlaer died!" the bed-fast matron bemoaned herself one day to her pastor's wife who was making a neighbourly call. "Her what used to be so even-tempered and cheerful, day in and day out, singin' about her work and runnin' to the piano every spare minute to try this or that tune! 'Seems-if she thought in music'—as Mr. Lang said once to me when he heard her warblin' like a bird upstairs when she was makin' the beds. She ain't the same girl, and I mistrust she never will be again. I don't mind tellin' you what's been her best friend so long and was so fond of *him*, that her heart's in that poor boy's grave. Not that she's let on a word about it. It went too deep for that. She was never one to talk about her feelin's. But a mother can see things other folks can't. I am as sure,

as if I had been told by both of them, that they would have been man-and-wife by now, if he had lived—poor dear! I put it right at her not a week after he was buried, and she run off to her room with never a word, and locked herself in for the rest of the day. I spoke to Father about it, and he advised me to let her alone 'till such time as she was able to talk it out to me of her own accord. And *obstinate!* you wouldn't think it of her, Mrs. de Baun, but she is downright *heady!* She took cold the night of the fire, and has had a cough ever since. I wanted her to see the doctor one time he was here to me, but she wouldn't. 'I've never had a doctor in my life, and I'm not goin' to begin now,' says she. 'It's nothin' but a little cold that will be gone when I've taken your cough-syrup for a few days,' says she, more natural-like than I'd seen her in a long time."

From force of habit she picked up her knitting. To lie quiescent was a physical and mental impossibility. She knitted two pairs of stockings per week, the stiffened hands being incapable of any other occupation.

"I'd go stark crazy if I had to lie here and think!" she broke out, now in response to the visitor's compliment to the exceeding smoothness of the web of fine lamb's wool growing into shape under the knotted knuckles. "And such *times* as I have to think of! It isn't a year ago that I said I wouldn't 'change places with any livin' human being. And *now!*"

She tossed the ball spitefully toward the footboard.

"Father, he will have it that it's not right to say it! But it *does* seem as if Providence had a grudge against us, an' was a-paying of it off!"

"*Dear* Mrs. Van Dyck!"

The protest was cut short:

"O, yes! I know what you are goin' to say! But put

it to yourself! First, there's the misery that filthy creature brought upon us. Then the death of the man what would have married my only daughter. And the wicked lies people believe about the bones they found on the mountain. And now the fire! Father was tryin' to show me yesterday there was somethin' to be thankful for, because he'll get the insurance-money. Says I to him—‘John Van Dyck! all the money in the United States won't give me back my boy, nor bring Will Corlaer to life, nor h'ist me out of this bed, nor stop folks from takin' away the good name of a family what has never had a word spoken against it for a hundred years. I shouldn't be a mite surprised to hear it said that you set the mill afire with your own hands for to get the insurance-money, seein' it was no good, now there's nobody fit to run it.’”

“My dear Mrs. Van Dyck!” The minister's wife made another futile attempt to stem the tide. “Don't distress yourself with imagining these horrible things. Mr. Van Dyck is too much honoured in the neighbourhood where he was born, and in which he has lived so long, for such a slander to be so much as hinted. Have faith in his friends and yours. Where is Sarah? I seldom see her now-a-days.”

“Mercy knows!” Like more intelligent church-members, the worthy woman piously abstained from taking the name of the Deity in vain, by substituting synonyms conveying the same idea without fracturing the Third Commandment. “S'like's not, traipisin' off in the fields or in the woods. ‘For exercise!’ she says. ‘S'if she didn't get all the exercise she needs in-doors! She works hard—I'll agree—but she puts no spirit into what she does. It makes me want to fly to see her moonin', and lookin' so peaked!’”

"Poor child! we must remember that she has had a great sorrow," her best friend urged gently. "If you do not object, I will try to find her."

Without waiting for permission, she betook herself first, to the lower part of the house, wondering with exceeding admiration in her progress from room to room, at the shining cleanliness of each when the mistress had been confined to her bed for a month. Sauchy and her niece must toil incessantly to keep the domestic machine in the perfect order the disabled woman would maintain were she up and about. Sauchy and the young "bound girl" were in the kitchen. The lady dallied in the comfortable quarters to say a few pleasant words to them. Then she asked for Sarah. Jane, the apprentice, could tell her nothing. Sauchy, whose humour seemed to be inclement, shook her head violently and affected not to understand the question. It was one of what her sister-in-law called her "provoking ways," to feign stupidity when she chose to keep her own counsel. One thing was plain; the girl was not in the house, unless she were hiding purposely to avoid the visitor.

Concealing her perturbation from the invalid, she left an affectionate message for the missing daughter.

"I hope she is taking advantage of the fine day to get a long walk. The air is cold, but not sharp. It will do her good. Tell her she must give the Parsonage the benefit of her rambles. I have hardly seen her for weeks and weeks. And give her my dear love."

She saw no one on her way to the lower gate where she had left her carriage. The blackened timbers of the mill sprawled irregularly over the shrunken stream below the dam, showing a wide space of wintry sky the building had screened from view. To the pained observer the scene was forlornly unlovely—almost squalid. Mr.

Van Dyck and one of the sons had gone to the city "to see about the insurance-money," the wife reported. But for the thin blue reek rising from two chimneys, the old homestead might have been deserted. Against will and reason, the pitiful plaint—"Seems-if-Providence had a grudge against us," recurred to her. Had she been a Romanist she would have crossed herself to exorcise the blasphemous thought. As it was, she muttered to the bleak silence—"God forbid!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE profane fancy was not wholly “downed” when Mrs. de Baun rang the bell at the Corlaers’ door. She had been there scores of times, since the summer day on which she paid, as now, a visit to the Van Dyck home and drove, next, to the mansion before her. She saw again the misery in Sarah’s eyes and the happiness in Carrie’s, the triumph in Margarita’s.

Contrasts were less sharply defined to-day, but outward evidences of adversity and of prosperity were patent to a casual spectator. The French windows of the drawing-room were unshuttered, and rosy gleams of fire-light flickered through, mocking the pale sunshine. The deciduous shrubbery dotting the lawn was swathed in straw; clumps and hedges of evergreens stood up, calmly confident of returning spring. In the distant stables men were singing and whistling; a flock of pigeons, blue and white, strutted and cooed over crumbs thrown from the kitchen-window. Not a picket was missing or loose in the fence surrounding the spacious grounds; there was not a chip or stick upon the sere turf. The approving smile of Providence was over all.

“And, *yet!*”

She had nearly said it aloud to the butler who startled her from reverie by throwing back the door with a flourish:

“Good morning, ma’am! Mrs. Corlaer, ma’am, saw you from the window, and would you mind, ma’am, going right

up to her room? She has a cold, and finds it warmer up there than downstairs."

"The cold is a mere trifle," explained his mistress, meeting her guest in the upper hall. "It is warmer here, but I wanted to have you to myself, and Carrie and Margarita are writing letters in the drawing-room."

She led her friend into the large light chamber looking toward the church.

From Mrs. Corlaer's chair one could see the bold swell of earth roofing Colonel John Corlaer's vault. She laid a stick upon the fire and bade the visitor "draw up close to it and get warm."

"They tell me that it is rather mild to-day, but I have not found it out. I was wishing just now, that you would drop in. Mr. Corlaer was never more bound to the business-rack than he is now, and the girls are as busy in their way."

Mrs. de Baun smiled intelligence in glancing at the work the hostess took from the stand beside her.

"They are fortunate in having a mother who can hem-stitch handkerchiefs by the dozen, and so beautifully! Those are for Carrie, I suppose?"

"No! Margarita begged me to begin upon hers—as she says—'while my eyes hold out?' I finished the third dozen for Carrie last Saturday. I find that my eyes are not so strong as they used to be. I cannot trust them upon fine sewing by artificial light. I am told that one can buy handkerchiefs already hemstitched in New York. The girls insist they cannot be 'nice!' It would save millions of stitches if they were."

"I wish you could be excused from doing such work," Mrs. de Baun took the liberty due an old friend to remark. "Can't the girls take that upon themselves and let you save your precious eyesight by doing plainer sew-

ing? Flannel petticoats, for instance?" she appended, playfully "or perhaps *they* must be embroidered too?"

"Every one of them! Not to mention chemise yokes and sleeves, and ruffles for petticoats and drawers—in fact, everything a woman is expected to wear for ten years to come."

Mrs. de Baun stared aghast: "Surely, you will not have to take a hand with all of them? Let me help—won't you? I do love to do *silk* embroidery!"

Mrs. Corlaer's smile was loving and grateful.

"That is like you! to pretend you enjoy lifting a burden from other shoulders! But I am to do comparatively little of the more elaborate needlework. Patsey Walker will be the richer for the two weddings. You know her skill with the needle. She is enchanted at the prospect of having her hands full for months to come. I am hardly more interested in my daughters' preparations than she. The rest they must do themselves. It is fortunate that Patsey is so competent, and lives so near us."

"She is a good soul!" uttered Mrs. de Baun, earnestly. "And has had a hard life until now. I am thankful for her that the future promises so well. Mr. de Baun thinks that son of hers bids fair to do finely in the world. He deserves much credit for living down an ugly Past."

"Mr. Corlaer says the same. Dick has been more than a helper to him this winter. He is a comfort—shielding my husband from anything he thinks would annoy him, and, when he is not hindered, doing the work of two men in the office."

Her eyes were suffused with moisture, and hand and voice were less steady. The other hastened to change the subject.

"We had a pleasant letter from Mr. Lang last week, written from Berlin. He tells us he hopes to sail for

home in March. He appears to be making the most of his time. Everybody will be happy to have him back. His going left a big gap in all our lives. The new teacher is well enough, but there is only one Norman Lang."

"I will repeat that to Margarita. The separation has tried her spirits sorely. Mr. Adrain's weekly visits make her feel more keenly the difference between the circumstances of her engagement and her sister's. Not that she is not in full sympathy with Carrie, and we all like George—but you can understand?"

"I do—entirely!" (As when, indeed, did she not?) "It is pleasant to think the trial is so nearly over. Mr. de Baun and I speak often of what a blessing it is that both your girls have chosen so wisely and have such fair prospects of happiness."

"I am *very* thankful! So is their father. In time we may be able to rejoice more heartily in their happiness." She paused to steady her voice. "I have thought much lately of a sermon Mr. de Baun preached for us five years ago, from the text—'O Lord! I know that Thou, in faithfulness, hast afflicted me! I try to stay my soul upon these words:—'In *faithfulness!*'"

Through the flooring and the thick walls of three rooms, penetrated Margarita's strident tones. Memory supplied the words when the listeners distinguished the melody:

" 'Twas thy voice, my gentle Mary,
And thine artless, winning smile
That made this world an Eden,
My Mary of Argyle!"

If one of the hearers was shocked, she was careful not to betray it. The mother read her thoughts in part:

"You may think it strange she should sing *that*, and

that she should have the heart to open the piano at all? I suppose some do! Indeed, it has been said to me that it is 'not customary to have music in the house of mourning?' And *that* this must always be while his father and I live!"—breaking into vehemence her friend had never witnessed before. "Forgive me! I would not say it to any other woman I know. But *you* understand, as I said just now! It is not just or right to darken the lives of my daughters by the shadow that will never be lifted from mine. So, when Margarita told me that she was 'afraid Norman would find her backward with her music, and how she had hoped to beguile her loneliness by practising the art he loves so dearly,' I begged her not to regard the gossip of those who have no right to dictate what we shall do. She takes such comfort in practising and in singing songs that were favourites with them both, that I am repaid for the small sacrifice of my selfish notions."

"You are always right!" cried her more impulsive companion. "I don't believe I could ever rise to your height of self-sacrifice, but I can appreciate it. That shows I am not utterly depraved! And Margarita is to be commended for trying to please the man she loves."

"Have you seen or heard of any of the Van Dycks lately?" was Mrs. Corlaer's next query.

"I have just come from there. Mrs. Van Dyck is still confined to her bed and suffering greatly at times. It is especially hard for one naturally so active to be helpless."

Mrs. Corlaer dropped her voice and glanced involuntarily at the door:

"I was sadly grieved to hear from Mr. Corlaer that there may be an investigation into the origin of the fire, before the Company in which the mill was insured will

pay the money. It made me positively sick! He told me of the rumour last night, and I could not sleep for worrying over it. I should think that poor woman would be ready to cry out: 'All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me?' I pray that this last stroke may be averted. My husband attaches no credit to the story, and is prepared to testify to the excellent character of the father. I am afraid the boys are made of different stuff."

"I do not believe either of the two would be guilty of such a crime," rejoined her friend.

She was white with heart-nausea. "I can't bear to think that another blow will fall upon that family. I *won't* believe it! Past record ought to go for something!"

"I agree with you, entirely! If only for the sake of the parents—and the sister, I trust that the story is a falsehood throughout."

She spoke with sincerity that emboldened the listener to play a card she had carried in her sleeve through weeks of weariful waiting:

"You speak of the sister. I wish you could know what a lovely girl she is. I say 'a girl,' but she has developed into a noble woman. Don't be displeased with me, dearest of friends!—but I have longed to break the reserve which has hindered us from talking of something lying very near to my heart, and, I believe, to yours. You know that our dear Will (he was like a younger brother to me) loved her. She would not acknowledge that she returned his love until assured that his parents approved of the engagement. That was the state of affairs when he went to California. He had not one line from her while he was away. I could see that she was breaking her heart over the separation, but the brave girl never

breathed a word of her sufferings. Then he heard of the disgrace that had befallen her family, and hurried home to offer her the shelter of his love and his name——

“But *you* must know all this?”

The change that had come to the face before her had arrested the recital.

A bluish pallor and a stiffening of the muscles, a glitter of the eyes that were, but now, soft and benignant, wrought a transformation that terrified the animated pleader.

“Go on! Let me hear it all!”

The tone was as unfamiliar as the forbidding mask.

“He promised me, that morning, that he would tell you everything before he spoke to his father. And again, that night, I reminded him of his promise. I cannot believe you knew nothing of it!”

“Have I said I know much, or how little I know? I have asked for the whole truth as *you* know it! You speak of ‘that morning’ and ‘that night!’ When and where did he see and make a promise to you? Where did he meet *her*? ”

Mrs. de Baun was unnerved. Horrified and distressed, she blundered on:

“She was visiting at the Parsonage. He called in the forenoon, and talked with her.”

An imperious gesture halted her.

“With *your* knowledge and consent?”

If the preceding catechism had set her in the witness-box, the minister’s wife felt that she was now a criminal at the bar.

“He had told me enough before he went to California to let me know his feeling for her. I was too sorry for both to try to keep them apart. All I could do was to stipulate that you should hear all.”

Mrs. Corlaer put her hand to her head. For the first time she appeared at a loss to grasp the truth.

"And—'that—night'?" she said, slowly, feeling after her thoughts. "That was when, in the kindness of his heart—*as I thought*"—bitterly—"he took that poor crazy woman home! I recollect now that he said they went by way of the Parsonage. And that your husband and he 'took them home?' *He was in the conspiracy, too!*"

The wife was on her feet—erect and quivering—her spirit in arms.

"You cannot use that word in connection with him! He is the soul of honour! Not one word ever passed between him and your son with regard to this matter. I told him of it afterward. *I* was the confidante—the go-between—the 'conspirator,' as you call it! *I* was so heartily in sympathy with your son and the only girl he ever loved—and whom he loved through good report and evil report, until death parted them—that *I* would have helped them to the utmost of my power, if my husband had forbidden me. Which, thank heaven! he did *not!* *I* would have come to you with the whole story and pleaded for them, if Will would have allowed it. He meant to bear the consequences of his act, himself. If he had lived, *I* have faith in the triumph of the Right to feel sure he would have won you over to his side!"

She was crying now, but she could articulate to the end of her argument. As she finished, she buried her face in her handkerchief to stanch the tears she could not keep back.

Silence so profound that it was awful to one of the twain reigned in the room. The fire crackled presently—tentatively—and a minute later, the voices of the sisters, muffled by distance and walls, joined in the duet Mrs. de Baun had heard from her seat under the cherry-tree

last summer,—“The Messenger Bird.” Margarita had deadened her sensibilities by much piano-practice.

“I will go home, now!” said the visitor, rising with much of her accustomed graceful self-possession. “I am sorry if I have displeased you. I am more sorry if I have said anything to wound you. My only fault is that I was too fond of your son to let him be unhappy if I could do anything to prevent it. You have been so kind to me and to mine, that I cannot bear the thought of alienating you. When you think over what I have said,—you must see that I had no thought of disloyalty to you.”

Mrs. Corlaer sat still, her eyes fixed upon the opposite wall, the bluish pallor unyielding. Her hands were locked fast upon each other. Mrs. de Baun was at the door, her hand upon the bolt, before strained, hollow tones she had never heard before, turned her back.

“And yet”—every syllable an effort—“he—let—me—think—all—was—over! He deceived me when I held him in my arms that very night, and told him—he—was—the core—of—my—heart!”

The last words were a stifled shriek. The locked hands pushed the woman away who would have embraced her in a transport of remorse.

“The girl who, you say, is good, changed his very nature! But for her, he would be with me now. Would be loving me still! I could find it in my heart to *curse* her! The heart you and she have broken and *emptied* of love—and joy—and hope! She turned him against his mother. She *killed* him! May God reward her according to her works!”

It was terrible to see the distorted visage, and listen to the disjointed sentences jerked out of the set lips. The younger woman fell upon her knees and prayed aloud, hiding her eyes from the sight.

“Dear Lord! help her!”

She hardly knew that she said it, or that she had her arms about the lady’s waist, and was nestling her face in her lap, until she felt a hand upon her head.

“Perhaps I may see things differently by to-morrow!” The voice was not yet quite natural, but the intonations were less harsh. “Go home now, as you said you would. No! child! I am not angry with you. You have not been a mother long enough to comprehend what this discovery is to me. It was not *you* who took his love and confidence away from me. Do not ask me to forgive *her*! I never will!”

Bewildered and dejected, the would-be peace-maker crept out of the house, escaping the sisters, who were still warbling—

“O, say! do they love there still?”

Blindly she climbed into the carriage and drove home, baffled and wretched beyond any previous experience of her quiet, commonplace life.

Alpine guides tell us that a sudden outcry or laugh from the vale overhung by a poised avalanche, may bring down ruin and death upon homes below.

The hapless lady, left to her haunted solitude, might never have heard the superstition. She would not have associated it with her plight if she had. For a long hour she sat bowed together as one bound to the wheel, and praying for the *coup de grace* that would be the end of feeling. It should have fallen, if there were mercy in Heaven, with the horrible imagination that sprang into life in the recollection of a single phrase:

“*He promised that he would tell you everything before he spoke to his father!*”

He meant, then, to carry the story to his father! He had changed his mind so far as *she* was concerned. He had made a formal appointment with his father for an interview. The business-conference was on the preceding day. As vividly, as with her bodily sight, she saw the boy as she kissed him "good-bye" that fatal morning and watched him from the porch walk down the road—to his death!

How had that death come to pass? She had questioned Dick Walker the day Will died, with regard to finding her son upon the office-floor. She had interrogated the doctor yet more closely as to the patient's condition and symptoms. Until this instant she had believed fall, hemorrhage and concussion of the brain to be consequent upon extreme weakness. He had not gauged his forces aright. The excitement of the return home, nervousness, induced by the necessity of rendering account of his stewardship (that was the way he put it to her), and a dozen other causes, had worn him out. He had fainted when the strain of the second talk with his principal was over, fallen and struck his head. She had Dr. Ten Eyck's word that there was nothing whatever out of the ordinary in it all.

Now! She marvelled that she had perceived nothing ominous in her husband's obstinate reserve respecting the interview which lasted—according to Dick's testimony—more than three-quarters of an hour. Her husband had rebuffed her almost roughly when she would have heard from him something of the last coherent words their son was ever to speak on earth. He was fearfully broken by their common bereavement. Dr. Ten Eyck had dissuaded her from questionings that would reopen the wound.

She must never speak of it again! She was not an old

woman. There might be twenty-five years more for her to live, and through them all, this cross would be bound upon her soul. The suspenseful anguish of her Gethsemane was to endure for all that time. She must tread the wine-press alone; drink, to the bitter dregs, waters of a full cup to be wrung out unto her.

CHAPTER XXV

IT is winter, not March, this year, that came in like a lion and will go out like a lamb, if this weather lasts a fortnight longer."

The speaker was the sweet-faced mistress of the manse, standing at the open window of her dining-room for a satisfactory survey of the row of hyacinth-glasses ranged upon the sill.

"They never bloomed so early before, and they were never so lovely," she continued, stooping to inhale the fragrance coaxed from the swaying bells by the bland air. "And this is only the middle of February."

Without looking around, she had addressed her husband, who, equipped for a round of pastoral calls, had turned back at the front-gate where his horse and carriage were waiting for him.

He thrust a paper between her and the flowers.

"Dick Walker brought it. He said it required an answer, but did not wait for it. I told him I would bring it as I went by. The boy looked so serious I am afraid something has gone wrong. Read it!"

The note was from Patsey:

"Dear Madam: If you can possibly come to see me this afternoon, *please do!* I have something to tell you that will interest you. I am pretty well nigh worried to death over it, though it don't concern me, or mine—thank God! except as I am awful sorry for them that are hurt by it.

“This is *confidential* with you and the Dominie. Not a word to any other soul—*please!*”

P. W.”

“What’s up, I wonder! I thought we had had our fill of sensations for one season. Now, that it can’t be proved that the mill was fired by any of the Van Dycks, and they are likely to get the insurance-money—I hoped we would settle down into the old respectable jog-trot. Get your things on, dear, and I will drop you at Patsey’s door. You will get there sooner than if you walk, and I can see you are at the last gasp with curiosity—the very last gasp!”

“Judging me by yourself?” was the retort.

Both were in fine spirits. Patsey’s “something” could not touch them very nearly. They had seen all the Corlaers, and several of the Brouwers that day, and the Parsonage babies were racing up and down the garden walks under their eyes at that moment.

Arriving at Patsey’s house, Mr. de Baun helped his wife to alight, and inquired if he should call for her.

Patsey answered for her from the door-step:

“*If* you wouldn’t mind, sir! It’s likely I’ll detain her quite a while, and if you don’t mind, I think I’d wish to have a little talk with you, too.”

He looked at her keenly. Her complexion was mottled oddly, and her eyes were red. Her speech had nothing of her wonted liveliness, and she was preternaturally grave.

“What has gone wrong with you, Patsey? Can I be of any use?”

“I wish to the Lord you *could*, sir!” The tears welled up thickly. “It’s too late! too late! I won’t hinder you now. You’ll know all about it soon enough.”

She led the wondering visitor into the house and shut

the door. Then she pulled forward a chair for her, threw herself into another, and burst into a flood of weeping.

“O, Mrs. de Baun! you can’t imagine a worse thing than what’s happened. Leave me alone for a second, and I’ll tell you from the word ‘Go.’”

The lady’s terror-stricken expression restored her to sense and speech in an incredibly brief time. She told a straight story. She had no heart for digressions.

“Nigh upon six o’clock this morning, I heard a bangin’ at the door, and who should it be but Sauchy Van Dyck! She was all out of breath, with runnin’, but she made out to tell me I must come right over there ‘to see ‘Baby,’’’ she calls her, who was dreadful sick. I can understand her lingo, having known her so long, and I said I’d be there at once. She ran back as fast as she had come. I was all dressed and had Dick’s breakfast ready, and I didn’t lose a minute. As Providence would have it, I had sense enough to tell him to go for Dr. Ten Eyck. Sauchy ain’t easily scared. I ran pretty near all the way, myself—I’d got so stirred up. It was lucky I did, for the baby was born half-an-hour after I got there.”

“*The baby!*” The ejaculation was a shriek.

For a moment the room was a whirl of darkness. She heard from afar off, Patsey’s—“There! there, dear! I hadn’t ought to have let it out so sudden!” and felt the spatter of cold water upon her face.

“Go on!” were her first conscious words. “I can’t believe it!”

“Nor I wouldn’t, if I could help it! Dr. Ten Eyck got in surprisin’ soon. He’d been to a case and Dick caught him just as he got home. He knew something very much out of the way must be the matter, and he drove over without waitin’ a minute.

“I’ve been through a-many tryin’ scenes, Mrs. de Baun,

but I hope never to see another like that. The doctor himself was that taken aback he hardly knew what he was about. And though her room is at the other end of the house, we could hear Mrs. Van Dyck a-callin' out for somebody to tell her what was goin' on. And she, chained to her bed, as you might say! An' *that* Sauchy! as pleased as could be when she saw the child, and soberin' down when we told her 'twas a boy. Then, if you'll believe me, when she see me wrap it in a towel, she ran off to the garret and come haulin' down an old trunk full of clothes what had belonged to Sarah when she was a baby. Most of them Sauchy had made herself, and 'twas her that had put them away and saved them all these years—poor foolish thing!

“But the terriblest of all was when Mr. Van Dyck come in from the barn where he and Cort had been milkin' and so on. He hadn't so much as seen the doctor's buggy, for he had hitched it at the big gate, and come right into the house, and so up-stairs. I'd been obleeged to see Mrs. Van Dyck, and let her know what was goin' on, and I counted upon her tellin' *him*. But everything went askew somehow, and the first person he saw when he stopped in the kitchen for to wash his hands, was that horrid little Jane, who blurted it all out. An' up-stairs he come, a-stormin' like mad, and into the room where I was dressin' the child, an' we'd just got Sarah comfortable an' quiet. Before the doctor could ketch holt of him, he marched up to the bed and shook his fist in her face. An' says he, in a sort of roar—a-shakin' the other fist over the baby's head—‘Whose brat is that?’

“She laid there as calm as I am now, an' looked up in his face as brave as could be (her that was always that respectful to her father!) an' says she—‘*Mine!*’ He couldn't get another word out of her, for all he raved an'

carried on about 'the shame she had brought on him and her mother.' Then it was that Dr. Ten Eyck took hold of him by the two arms, and pushed him clean out of the room.

" 'My patient *must* be kept quiet?' he says, so determined there was no resistin' him.

"He ain't much to look at, but his heart is in the right place. Before he went home, he took me into Sauchy's room across the hall and when he tried to give me his instructions, he choked up an' couldn't speak for a little while. You may be sure I gave way like a fool when I saw that, and we cried together.

" 'I wouldn't have had this happen for a mint of money!' says he, at last. 'When did you know about it?'

"With that, I said as how, old woman an' nurse as I am, I hadn't suspicioned it. We agreed it come ahead of time, as it certainly did. It's a mite of a baby, but all right, an' the Lord forgive me!—I'm sorry to say it's likely to live!

"Nobody but the doctor an' me—an' that fool Sauchy, who is off what head she has for joy! nobody else, I say, has a kind word for the poor girl who is payin' for somebody else's sin as well as her own."

Mrs. de Baun looked steadily at her:

"I am afraid that people will have no doubt who that is! What do you think, Patsey?"

"Haven't I been askin' myself that question all day! I know, as you say, what everybody will believe. I won't trust myself to think about it! I loved that boy as if he had been my own flesh-an'-blood. He meant to marry her. I had it from his own lips the day he fell sick. If him—an' her—are sinners—all I've got to say is that there's other folks what may blame themselves for it!"

"That's one reason I asked you to come to me, instead of me goin' to your house. For one thing, *these*"—waving her hand in a circle—"are about the only walls anywhere in this region what hasn't got ears. They're two foot thick, and solid stone. I don't pretend to say *who* gets on to ugly stories and sets 'em a-goin' in Kinapeg. I *do* say none of 'em start *here!* But they *do* start, an' they fly when once they get their breath. What I want to consult you an' the Dominie about is how are to manage this affair? We can't get out of it—no way we can fix it. If it could be hushed up, I, for one, wouldn't be backward in what you might call 'circumnavigatin' the exact truth. Of two sins, choose the least, I say. I s'pose I'm a rank sinner to think of it, but I'll lie point-blank to save a woman's reputation, any day. If it could be done! Even if we could cut that Jane's dirty tongue out—and I'd like to have the job! there's too many others in it. The only question is if we can agree upon some plan for makin' it easier all 'round. Nobody will ever convince you, nor me—nor Dick, for that matter—that Sarah Van Dyck is a bad girl. I can recollect things, now, that show how she has repented, and how she has gone pretty nigh crazy over it. I didn't understand then. I do now, and sure as you an' me are sittin' here, there's joy this day in heaven over one sinner that has repented."

"I believe it!" was the solemn response. "I can see now, why she has avoided me for a long while, and the reason for her deep depression of spirits. Poor child! what she must have suffered! If only she had taken us into her confidence, we might have shielded her in some way; sent her away to a Retreat—or something of the kind. Now—all we can do is to speak charitably of her when gossips make free with her name—as they *will*—and be as kind to her as she will let us be! She has hardened sadly of

late. I can see why, now. If that poor boy had lived, justice would have been done her!"

"There's things that can't be set right, nohow you can fix it!" returned Patsey, despondently. "As for hopin' for justice and mercy from folks in general, it's a poor lookout. Them what has made a misstep an' found how hard 'twas to get back, can sympathise with others what's done the same. I never saw Dick so cut up about anything as he is over this. When I told him at dinner-time—me bein' later than common—what had happened, the boy turned white as a sheet, and dropped into his chair, quite overcome. Couldn't swallow a mouthful, and was that downhearted I felt as sorry for him 's if the trouble had been his'n."

Distracted though Mrs. de Baun was by other thoughts, she could recall her husband's remark, that when Mrs. Van Dyck was worried or fretted, she reverted to early habits of language and manner.

"There is some occult connection between mental distress and a plurality of negatives," was his deduction from the fact.

By one of the incongruities of human nature that must ever remain unsolved, the absurdity obtruded itself upon her, and kept recurring in spite of her impatience with it and herself, as Patsey rushed on:

"He has a-feelin' heart—that boy has. An' he'll never forget that 'twas her what was the first person to speak to him—last year! She was comin' out of the post-office as he was kind of skulkin' along, afraid to meet anybody's eyes, and stopped him right there, with a dozen people lookin' on. And says she—'Why, Dick, how do you do? I'm glad to see you again. I can think how happy your mother must be!'

"As friendly an' easy 's if he had been away on an or-

dinary trip! 'An' her goodness to me is past my tellin'. He worships the ground she walks on, an' I ain't far behind him."

She was at her post in Sarah's chamber by three o'clock. Mother and child were sleeping quietly, and Sauchy was on guard, the grimdest of sentinels. She had had a battle-royal with her sister-in-law, when, moved by Sarah's entreaties, she repaired to the lower part of the house to see to the preparation of dinner. Jane had things in a state of unexpected forwardness, and Sauchy took Mrs. Van Dyck's tray up to her.

As soon as she entered, she was assailed by a storm of invective, as unmerited as pitiless. "Sauchy had spoiled her niece until she was good-for-nothing. The two of them had dragged the family into the mud. Sarah was, henceforward, no child of her respectable parents. The best thing to do with her was to put her and the brat out-of-doors as soon as she was able to move"—and so much more to the same effect that the purport pierced its way to the quick of the hearer's heart. She listened, dumbly savage, until the threat of expulsion was made. Then she picked up the tray she had set upon the stand by the bed, and deliberately emptied the teapot, cream-jug and covered dish of creamed codfish, the plate of bread and the saucer of custard—into the fire.

"*You go, too!*" she said, in her deepest gutturals. "Baby and Boy here! Me"—tapping her chest, proudly—"with *them*!"

She rarely said so many consecutive words, and pantomime filled in the gaps. She would fight to the death for her darlings. The bed-fast woman believed her capable of carrying out the menace. Sauchy left her wailing as weakly as the baby at the other end of the hall might be doing, and betook herself to the arrangement of

a second tray for her namesake. Mr. Van Dyck, catching some sounds of the fray from below, shook off his selfish absorption in grief so far as to inquire the cause. Sauchy stalked by him in the hall, head up and nostrils distended with the glee of conquest.

Verily, the erst favourite of a discriminating Providence had his full share of affliction in the turn of Fortune's wheel!

Patsey got a digest of the tale, and put it behind her as beneath contempt. She kept out of Mrs. Van Dyck's room for the rest of the day. She had never liked her. Gathering from Sauchy's abstract of the scene, the disposition of the virtuous matron to make a clean sweep of sinner and the fruit of her iniquity, she cast the whole weight of her indignant sympathy upon the wrong side. Her exhausted patient slumbered heavily for most of the afternoon. The baby-boy could not be doing better.

"He'll likely sleep pretty steady for a month to come," she observed to the doctor at his second call. "It's a way they have of makin' up for lost time. Will I come back to-night? You'd better believe wild horses—not to mention other folks"—significantly—"couldn't keep me away. Sauchy will look after them while I go home. She's better than ten watch-dogs."

She had thought it prudent to acquaint the man-of-healing with the mother's outburst. It was well to be prepared for future clashes.

"It is only what might be prognosticated!" was his reassurance. "She will subside into normal passivity when nerves and temper have readjusted themselves. I apprehend that it is her pride, more than her maternal affection, which has received the severer laceration."

"Just my idea!" assented Patsey. "She thinks a plaguey sight more of her blamed respectability than she

does of her poor child. All the same, doctor, it might be as well for you to give her a dose of something quietin', so 's she won't disturb us by screechin' when the house ought to be still at night. *I'll stand by the ship—sink or swim!*"

Her fighting blood—and there was plenty of it—was up. It was heated to boiling point by the meeting with Mr. Van Dyck that evening. Dick brought her over after supper.

"I'll run home for my meals regular," she told him. "Somehow it would choke me for to eat a mouthful in that house. If I had never been set against 'em before, these carryin's-on would sicken me of the old Pharisees!"

The father met her at the door, and led her into the sitting-room.

He had been there alone since the boys went off—he did not inquire whither—after supper. An open Bible lay upon the stand before his chair. A large red silk handkerchief—limp and crumpled—was beside it.

"Sit down, Patsey," he began. The whining drawl that used to wind up sentences of pious portent, was constant and pronounced. "Jane told me you were coming, and I waited to have family worship until you could join me. You and I can feel for one another as everybody couldn't. Each of us has seen the child of the Covenant and of many prayers become a castaway. Your case is, in one particular, less deplorable than mine. Your unhappy boy had never made a public profession of religion, and was not liable to the discipline of the church. It has come to me, to-night, while sitting here and trying to find consolation in Holy Writ, that my name is to be disgraced still more than it has been done already by ungrateful and unnatural children. My daughter, being the only one of the four who is a church-member, must be suspended from

the Ordinances for a time, if not excommunicated. I shall—as a member of the Consistory—call upon Dominie de Baun to-morrow and ask that this be done promptly. At the same time I shall tender my resignation as an Elder of the Church."

Patsey boiled over there:

"You couldn't do a better thing! Our church holds to 'rotation of office'—that's what they call it—ain't it? an' there's not a few what have said that the rule ought to be carried out. You must have been in nigh upon fifteen years. 'Tain't consistent, I say! You'll set a fine example by resignin', and you have a first rate excuse, as you say."

"You have not grasped my meaning, my good sister!" The patronising air nearly brought on another outgush, but as she said afterward to Mrs. de Baun—she "sat on the lid hard, and prayed!"

"I should—God willing! have held the office to which He and the votes of my brethren had called me, until He was pleased to translate me to the Upper Sanctuary. I shall resign because my garments are, so to speak, spotted by the flesh. Through no fault of mine, but because my child of whom, God forgive me! my wife says I made an idol—has stained an honourable name with the blackest of crimes. I cannot let the church of my fathers become a by-word and a hissing among the sons of Belial. O, that I should have lived to see this day!"

His chin fell upon his shirt-front; he pressed the red silk handkerchief to his eyes. It was voluminous. Patsey speculated idly, whether or not it would be sacrilegious to tell Dick that, for the life of her, she could not help thinking of a fat Robin Redbreast.

"It *does* seem like a pity!" briskly. "But, if I was you, Mr. Van Dyck, I wouldn't bother my brains about other

folk's sins, no matter how near-kin they are. They tell me the Bible doesn't say 'Every tub shall stand on its own bottom,' but it had ought to be there. Anyhow, it's in Pilgrim's Progress, and that's the next best book printed. So long as you make *your* callin' an' election sure, it's all can be expected of a poor sinful creatur! I don't feel to want to discuss any other person's shortcomin's with you. An' I mistrust *my* callin' just now is up-stairs. But while you were argufyin', there popped into my head—it's funny how such things happen! there come into my mind a text I once heard a preacher in Jersey City read. I disremember the *sermon*! 'Twas the way he bore down hard upon one word that struck me dumb. Bein' an Elder an' used to leadin' prayer-meetin's, *you* recollect the whole chapter? 'Twas where the Lord is talkin' about them what will say to Him at the Last Day how they prophesied in His name (that's leadin' in meetin', I take it!) an' in His name done many wonderful works. 'Then I will say unto them, I never knew *you*!' I'd never thought of puttin' it *that* way! Likely's not, you'll call it disrespectful, but, to save my life, I couldn't help think' 'twas the same way we speak to people who claim acquaintance with us, when we don't want to have anything to do with 'em—"You have the advantage of me!" The way he put the emphasis upon that '*you*' made an impression upon me I have never forgot. My mother used to tell me when I got a tiptop thing like that, it was a Christian duty to pass it on. 'S I say, it popped into my mind, quite unexpected, while you were talkin' about not makin' the church of your fathers a by-word an' a hissin'. Queer! wasn't it? I'm afraid you'll have Fam'ly Prayers by yourself, to-night, without you go up-stairs and comfort Mrs. Van Dyck with 'em. It's a burnin' shame for me to waste so much of *your* time gabblin' here, when

you might be studyin' the Scriptures and mournin' over the sins of our children!

“Good night!”

She halted at the door and smiled happily:

“But that was a bully notion!—makin' so much out of one word in a text—wasn’t it? I’m glad I thought to tell you about it. I hope it will stick by you as it has by me!”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE regular Monthly Meeting of the Consistory will be held on Wednesday evening of this week in the Pastor's Study." The notice, word for word, had been read from the pulpit of the Kinapeg church twelve Sundays in the year for three-quarters of a century.

To one unacquainted with recent events that had shaken the foundations of Society within the month separating the first Sunday in April from those preceding and following it, there would have been no significance in the announcement upon that particular day. Yet the pastor's voice was less sonorous than usual, and he laid aside the slip of paper containing the calendar of weekly services with a sinking heart and tremulous hand.

"The hardest job of my life!" he confessed to his wife when they were safe at home. "But the reality of the meeting will be ten times worse. I can enter into the feelings of Abraham when commanded to sacrifice Isaac. The face of the poor child arose between my eyes and the paper as I began to read. I wish from my soul some tougher chap—one who is as much of a saint as I am a sinner at this minute—had it in hand! O, yes! you needn't trouble yourself to say it is a duty I owe to the church. I feel like a rascal in the anticipation. Like a full-fledged rascal!"

The pastor, four elders and four deacons made up the tale of the minor Church Court. Nobody had expected to see more than three elders present on Wednesday even-

ing. And most of them, if the truth were told, had thought that Mr. Corlaer would absent himself, if for no other reason, because popular report said his son had been engaged to marry the young woman to be dealt with on that occasion.

Yet when the meeting was "opened with prayer by the Pastor"—as would be recorded by the secretary—seven answered to the roll-call. Wilhelmus Corlaer was in his usual seat next to the Dominie, with a face of granite and eyes that betrayed nothing of tumults which his brethren divined must be raging behind their steady gaze. He had aged frightfully since his son's death, but nobody had heard a moan. When condoled with, he replied in conventional phrase, and changed the subject. If his stanch friend and pastor thought his absence to-night would have been in better taste than the outward performance of a duty which must rack his endurance to the utmost, he could but admire the father's iron composure and steadfast purpose. He was guarding the good name of the dead. The boldest scandal-monger there would not dare cast the shadow of suspicion upon one of this man's blood and household.

Preliminaries were brief and unimportant. The *crux* of the hour was in the reply of Elder Bartholf to what was technically known in the Kinapeg church as "the Constitutional Question." Stripped of verbiage, it called upon those present to say if they were cognizant of action on the part of any communicant of this particular branch of the Church of Christ, inconsistent with his or her Christian profession.

Johannes Bartholf was, next to John Van Dyck, the oldest member of the Consistory so far as term of service went. It was meet that he should be ready to report the "grievous lapse from Christian consistency of Sarah

Voorhees Van Dyck, daughter of our beloved brother John Van Dyck," et cetera.

The Dominie asked for no further evidence than his own concise statement that he had visited the person thus accused, had had from her lips confession of her error, and that he believed her to be contrite and willing to submit to the discipline the Church might see fit to impose. He entered no plea for the transgressor other than might be implied in his use of the word of "error" for "crime," and having condensed the gist of the matter into four terse sentences, held his peace.

The "body" stirred uneasily. Something remained unsaid which was of vital import in the mind of two elders and four deacons. Deacon Gansevoort Dubois, albeit the youngest man there, spoke out what the rest dare not hint, much less assert.

"It has reached my ears, Mr. President, and I dare say it has been heard by others of the brethren, that there may have been a private marriage which would materially alter the aspect of this case. May I ask if any one here has any knowledge of such an event?"

He sat down. All there had time to see Wilhelmus Corlaer grow as livid as a dead man, and his knuckles whiten in the clutch upon his cane, before the pastor said low and slowly, without raising his eyes from the floor:

"I have the assertion of the person under trial that there was no marriage!"

In the silence that ensued, all heard the father's long-drawn breath of intense feeling that might be relief. The blood ebbed back slowly to his cheeks; then—and one of the group felt that the man had never done a finer thing—he arose to his feet, erect as a palm-tree and firm as Gibraltar:

"Mr. President and fellow-members of the Consistory:

May I preface whatever may be your judgment of the case in hand by the suggestion that the sentence be made as lenient as is consistent with our duty as officers of this church and guardians of the morals of the members of the same?

“I enter this plea in consideration of the youth and previous good character of the offender. We have our pastor’s attestation to her penitence, and we may trust his word.”

He sat down, and for a moment there was no verbal response to the unexpected appeal. The pastor put his hand to his throat, before he stood up, and looked from one to another of the men about him. Hard-visaged they were for the most part, bronzed by wind and weather, and lined by years and care. Not one of them was merciless. Most of them had children of their own to whom thought flew, and over whom hearts yearned at the mention of the sinner’s youth.

Perhaps conscience and memory were busy with each.

“Brethren!” began Mr. de Baun, his hand again seeking his throat: “I do not speak for myself alone in saying that this deplorable affair is a personal grief. The brother who has just spoken has anticipated what I would have put into words but for the fear that the personal sorrow I have alluded to might bias my judgment. We are not to leave out of sight the great truth that the honour of the church must be conserved. At the same time, we cannot forget Who said in like circumstances—‘Neither do I condemn thee. Go in peace!’ It behooves us to bear both of these things in mind. Will some one make a motion embodying our decision? Or do you desire to devote more time and thought to the discussion?”

Another pregnant pause, and Abraham Sythoff, the

most diffident and taciturn member of the Consistory, dragged himself up:

"I move that the—*person*—in question be suspended from the ordinances of the Church for the space of three months, and that the pastor be requested to confer further with her and administer such reprimand as he may see fit."

In less time than it takes me to write of it, the motion was seconded and carried. A few items of miscellaneous business were brought forward and disposed of, and the meeting was adjourned. If nobody said outright that the sentence was milder than if the sinner had been older and of a different type of her sex, all felt it. Furthermore, the generally accepted theory was that to push the investigation would be a grievous offence to an influential member of their body.

"Least said, soonest mended!" commented Elder Sythoff to his companions as they strolled homeward.

And Deacon Dubois, dubiously—"Perhaps so! But I have my doubt as to the wisdom of letting circumstances alter cases beyond a certain point. It is an ugly business, at the best."

Their official share in it was over. They were at liberty to discuss the pros of the particular case (there were no cons) *ad libitum* in their respective households, and in the market-place, without let or hindrance.

The Dominie got him forth at nine o'clock next morning to acquit himself of the most painful of the obnoxious offices that had devolved upon him in the whole progress of the tragedy. If practicable, he would forestall Dame Rumour in conveying to the afflicted family tidings of Consistorial action.

A drizzling rain was falling, and under it the ruins of the mill were glazed to jetty blackness. He drove past

them, up the hill to the barn, and tied his horse under the wagon-shed. Meeting no one on the way, he climbed the steep path winding to the side-door, impressed, as his wife had been a month earlier, by the desolation that hung like the shadow of doom over the once-prosperous homestead. Full as his brain was of weightier matters, he could not help muttering:—

“If those boys were worth the powder and shot it would take to kill them, they would clear away the burnt beams and boards, if they did nothing more! There would seem to be a curse upon the place!”

The fancy softened look and speech in meeting with the stricken father who opened the door for him.

“I was on the watch for you,” was his greeting. “I supposed likely you would be here early. Walk in!” showing the visitor into the sitting-room. “Mother’s able to crawl around her room, but she can’t get down stairs yet. She’ll be thankful to see you presently. Sit down near the fire and take the dampness off before you go up. Sauchy, she *will* have a fire here on cold mornings.

“I tell her ‘tisn’t worth while. It doesn’t matter how things are for me now-a-days. But she is obstinate, and I let her have her way.”

“She has been a good sister to you always—faithful and true!” the Dominie tried to speak cheerily. “I am glad she looks out for your comfort now that the good wife is laid aside. When I see her faithful discharge of duty, I wish some of us who have superior mental advantages would emulate her example.”

Fearing lest he might seem unfeelingly abrupt, he postponed the inevitable.

The next words were therefore not altogether an unwelcome surprise: “The boys heard by milking-time this morning that the Consistory did their duty last night.

The sentence is lighter than I had expected. Who made the motion?"

"Abraham Sythoff." He fancied that a shade of disappointment flitted across the other's face at the reply, but held on his way: "It was seconded at once and carried without a word of dissent." The feeling manifested throughout the meeting was most kind and sympathetic."

"Was Wilhelmus Corlaer present?"

"He was! I omitted to mention that he was the first to suggest that leniency in judgment and in action should be exercised."

A sneer contorted the listener's visage.

"He omitted to say why, I presume?"

"He gave no reason for the suggestion, other than the youth and contrition of the person whose error was under consideration. But we will not waste words in disposing of a painful subject. Your child——"

"She has forfeited all right to the title, Dominie! What you are kind enough to slur over as an 'error' is the blackest crime a woman can be guilty of in the sight of God and man. While she and her illegitimate child remain under my roof, I shall never willingly hold any intercourse with her. You speak of contrition. I see no sign of it in her obstinate refusal to give up the name of the partner of her crime. I have laboured in vain to persuade her that it is her duty to make full confession. She will say nothing but 'The child is *mine!* That is all anybody need to know.'

"You know as well as I do, the direction in which our suspicions must point. I adjured her, in her mother's name and mine, to give evidence of repentance unto life by revealing the whole disgraceful truth. I even reminded her that the fair name of the innocent might suffer through her stubborn refusal. It was like pouring water

upon a rock. Her very nature seems to be changed. Her mother has not been able to walk to her daughter's room as yet. I anticipate no good results from the meeting when it does take place."

"Postpone it as long as you can!" Aware of the senior's fondness for his own eloquence, the pastor had not interrupted the outgoing up to this point. "The worst is over for you all. I advise you, as I shall advise Sarah, to let the dead past bury its dead. What is done is beyond remedy. I believe her to be sincerely penitent. It is not for us to withhold forgiveness of sins when the Master has cast them behind him. Don't think of disowning her, or her innocent child. They are your own flesh and blood, and your duty toward them is plain. You will see this more clearly when the smart of the wound is not so fresh.

"Now"—dismissing his perfunctory manner, he arose—"may I go up to see Mrs. Van Dyck? I have a busy day before me."

The elder was professional on the instant.

"By all means. And you have the 'reprimand' to deliver. Nobody can regret the necessity laid upon you in the exercise of your painful duty more than I do."

After a remark which was, at least, extraordinary when one reflected upon his relation to the one to be censured, he ushered the pastor up the stairs into his wife's room.

She sat by the window overlooking, through the naked branches of the cherry-tree, the blackened ruins and the bridge skirting them. If she coveted the luxury of woe, she assuredly had it in the contemplation of the defaced picture without, and the desolation of pride and hope within.

Her knitting-work lay idly in her lap, the withered

and veinous hands lying loosely upon it. The scrupulous neatness of the chamber and her person betokened regard for outward seeming that never left her. But her face was no longer comely and complacent, and her greeting to the visitor was smileless. She, too, entered without prelude upon the matter that was uppermost in the minds of all three.

"I ain't got a word to say against it, Dominie. In my time, such a thing would have turned a woman clean out of church for good and all, and no respectable person would have ever spoken to her again. I told Father I knew it was out of respect to him and what the fam'ly used to be, that she's let off so easy. I had hoped to be thankful it was done. I ain't sure that it don't make the disgrace harder to bear. Seems, somehow, as if the heft of it is shifted off upon us two."

Whereupon, like the valiant soldier of the Cross that he was, her spiritual adviser spoke with the tenderness of a son and the authority of the ordained priest. He tried to divert her mourning over her damaged pride to thoughts of her child's young life, blighted by one sin. He reminded her of the numberless gentle and lovable traits that had endeared the erring one to all who knew her, and appealed to her common sense to decide if these graces of soul and heart were destroyed by the single misstep. But he dwelt chiefly upon the Christian duty of absolute forgiveness of the wanderer, unto seventy-times seven. How could sinful mortal dare condemn where the Holiest One pardons freely?

Without waiting for her reply, he proposed to pray with husband and wife, and poured out his heart in loving supplication for their broken spirits and wounded affections. Never a word of the blow to pride, and their suffering under the contumely of neighbours and the os-

tracism of acquaintances. These were in his sight lighter than vanity, not to be mentioned while they were in the Divine presence, and striving to see and think and feel with the Divine comprehension.

Tears suffused the eyes of the mother, and the father wept outright as they arose from their knees. The Domine did not resume his chair.

“The Lord bless you and keep you, and cause His face to shine upon you! The Lord give you peace!” he pronounced, pressing a hand of each within both of his. “I will see you again soon. Good morning!”

He was out of the room and half-way down the hall leading to Sarah’s chamber, before either recovered voice.

He was expected, for Sarah was alone except for the child in the cradle beside her. Sauchy was busy elsewhere. She spent every spare minute at the shrine of “Boy.”

“Don’t get up!” said the new-comer, when the girl would have come forward to receive him. “You are not strong enough yet to move around much. But you are looking better than when I saw you last.”

The scarlet blood that dyed the fair skin reminded him of the circumstances of the visit paid two days before. It was then he had had her confession of penitence. The interview had been a crucial test of her strength and of his resolve to deal with her justly, yet in mercy.

“My wife sent her love, and wants to know if you will be able to see her,” he hurried on to say.

Sarah raised sorrowful eyes, that were full of wonder, to his.

“I did not suppose she would care to come,” she said, simply.

“That shows that you have never understood how much she loves you. She would have been here before, but

feared it might overtax your strength. The doctor advised her to wait a little longer."

"Dr. Ten Eyck knew that she meant to come?"

"Certainly he did, my child!" The growing wonder and the sorrow in look and utterance almost broke down his self-control. "He is your warm friend, too. I would not deceive you in such things. You must trust those who love you and who would serve you if they could.

"I have a message for you from the Consistory that may prove how kindly others feel toward you."

Without other preamble, he told her what had been done the previous evening, holding back nothing and glossing over neither word nor action.

She heard him through in mute attention, lying back in her rocking-chair, her eyes fixed upon the fire, her countenance unchanged save for the pallor that crept up to the temples and made her face ethereal. She was never more lovely, the speaker thought, in watching the clearing of eyes and expression—he could have said, the elevation of the spirit shining through. He was not prepared for the rapid rush of colour and her distressed look as she sat upright at the close of his narrative:

"*Then*"—catching her breath convulsively—"for three months I am not a member of the church?"

He bent his head regretfully:

"If you choose to put it in that way. You are shut out from the ordinances of the church. It has nothing to do with your communion with your Heavenly Father. You are still His child. Nothing can alter *that*!"

Apparently she had not heard it. The thin hands wrung each other hard; her features were convulsed by a paroxysm of pain:

"That means"—bringing out each syllable with an effort—"that my baby can't be baptised!"

For the first time since her great sorrow overtook her, he saw her weep. "O God! my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

The sob rent his heart. For a few moments, he could not frame a reply. The room was still, but for the slow patter of the rain upon the porch-roof and the sighing of the fire.

Sarah took her hands from her face and tried to speak:

"I had never dreamed of *that*! Yet I might have known! My poor baby! who has never sinned!"

"Listen, dear child! Three months will soon be gone. Then you will be restored to full membership, and—"

An impatient gesture stayed the rest. She leaned toward him, hands locked and features working:

"But, Mr. de Baun! so many babies die in the summer! If—" She lapsed into weeping.

This would never do! The perplexed man laid a hand upon her arm.

"Listen to me, child! I hope the little one will live through this, and many other summers. Should the worst happen before he is made a baptised member of the church, he is always the Saviour's lamb—"

The awkward essay at comfort went no further.

"Can't you see that I want him to have the *sign*, if he should be with the other angels? I have thought of it, day and night! I didn't know that it *couldn't* be!"

The pastor's head dropped upon his clenched hands. He groaned aloud. This, then, had borne her head above the billows of shame and grief, and saved her from blasphemous despair. Superstition? Perhaps it might be. Might it not rather be the clutch of a drowning soul at the pledge of the Lover of little children—"In Heaven their angels do always behold the face of the Father?"

Had *He* waited to set the seal upon their brows before taking them into His arms and declaring—for all time—“Of such is the kingdom of Heaven?”

His resolution was taken:

“My daughter! stop crying and hear what I have to say! In our branch of the Christian Church, as in some others, godmothers and godfathers may represent the parents who, for any cause, do not take the vows upon themselves which are required from the child’s natural guardians.

“This may be done in your case, if you wish that the child shall be baptised before—you are—ready! to assume the vows of consecration. Think of some one whom you would select for this duty. I will do my part.”

She had glanced up eagerly as he began. At the last words her countenance fell piteously: the shamed blood suffused her face in a hot rush.

“I, don’t think, of, *anybody!*—” she began painfully. “Unless”—stumbling distressfully over the words—“perhaps, Mrs. Walker *might!* She knows things about me nobody else does. And you have seen how good she is to me. If she won’t, I must give up the thought.”

She quivered under the blow dealt by the possibility.

“I have no doubt she will! And you couldn’t have a better woman to ‘stand’ for him. I will see her and ask her.”

“No! no! *please!* You are very kind, but she would be more likely to do it if I were to talk to her. She comes in every evening to put him to bed. Auntie is busy then. Mrs. Walker is one of the few people to whom I can talk!”

“All right! couldn’t be better!” The Dominie got up and buttoned his coat across his chest. His tone was cordial, his bearing paternal.

"By the way, have you named him yet?"

"Yes!" Her eyes were upon the fire again, and the answer was nearly inaudible: "His name is *Benoni!* I couldn't give him any other."

"I couldn't have spoken a word after that, if my life had depended upon it!" the Dominie confessed to his wife, in recounting the incident. "It struck me to the heart! I hope I rallied sufficiently to say 'Good-bye!' but I wouldn't be positive as to that—I wouldn't be positive! The longer I think of the scene, the bigger the lump in my throat grows. I suppose I ought to dissuade her from fastening the name upon the poor innocent, but I can't!"

"He will be called 'Ben,'" returned the practical woman, thoughtfully. "In time it will be taken for granted that it is 'Benjamin.' Let her have her own way—poor girl! Do you know, Ed, ever since you told me about her choosing Patsey Walker as godmother,—I've been wondering—I won't say what! Nor think of it, if I can help it. Only, it would be a degree less dreadful than—some other things! It is all hideous enough!"

Her husband looked at her interrogatively:

"I don't see what you are driving at, little woman!"

Then a queer gleam shot athwart his face. "If you are off the track, keep off! If you are on, *get off!*"

With which oracular morsel, the dialogue ended.

There never was another wedded pair whose mutual understanding of things, seen and unseen, uttered and unspoken, was more complete.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was Mrs. de Baun's womanly tact that suggested the propriety and eminent expediency of a private christening. It was unusual, she admitted, except in the event of the serious illness of mother or child. Sarah's slow gain of strength, the uncertain spring weather and the extreme youth of the child justified departure from established rules. The ceremony should be private, and, beyond the formal registry of it upon the church books, as little mention be made of it as was compatible with the capacity of village gossip to nose out every event or incident occurring within the bounds of the parish.

One result of the arrangement had not been foreseen by any of those privy to it. Even Mrs. de Baun's imagination had not conceived the possibility that the deviation from the beaten track of ecclesiastical observance would modify the relation maintained by Mr. Van Dyck toward his daughter and grandchild. The presence of an ordained Elder was customary at a private christening. The pastor was stricken dumb with amazement by the receipt of a note three days before the appointed date, setting forth, in the grandiose verbiage habitual to his official moods and tenses, the grandfather's intention of being present on the "important and mournful occasion."

"It is certainly important. Circumstanced as my household is at the present time, it must be mournful. I am unwilling to allow the intrusion of an unsympathetic

acquaintance upon the privacy of our grief and the religious service to be performed under my roof.

“In view of these considerations, and urged by a sense of obligations associated with the office I hold in the Church whose pastor is to consecrate the unfortunate infant to the Master upon the occasion aforesaid, I am constrained to sacrifice personal preferences, and offer to be present at the christening aforesaid, in my capacity as an Elder of the aforesaid church, and perform such offices as may devolve upon me in that capacity.”

If anything could have pricked the bubble of colossal conceit conspicuous in every line of the effusion that had cost him hours of labour, it would have been the exclamation that concluded Mrs. de Baun’s second perusal:

“The Lord can make the wrath of man to praise Him! Why not arrant foolishness, as well?”

She was confirmed in the hope upon her arrival at the homestead on the set day, by finding the big parlours open and decorated for the ceremony.

Those who knew Sauchy best and longest, never comprehended how much her narrow intellect had gleaned of the meaning of religious services. When she chose to attend church, she went without consulting the family, occupying a place in the Van Dyck pew and conducting herself with decorum. By some method of communication known to the two, Sarah made her comprehend that her idolized “Boy” was to be “made a Christian” that afternoon. Mrs. Van Dyck offered no opposition to her plan of setting the state-parlours in order. Guided by love, the poor creature had put bunches of spring flowers on tables and mantels, and stuck sprays of hemlock and pine above pictures and mirror. She had invaded the recesses of Mrs. Van Dyck’s silver chest, and taken thence a silver bowl—a family treasure of great age

—filled it with water, and set it upon a stand draped with white linen, drawn into the middle of the front room. The old Family Bible was laid beside it, and a tiny glass containing a single white hyacinth flanked it upon the other side.

“All of her own notion!” Patsey seized a chance to say to the pastor’s wife. “I declare I think, sometimes, she’s sort of inspired—or something like that. She’s been at it since four o’clock this mornin’. An’ to see her dress that baby! I just broke down and cried like a fool!”

Mrs. de Baun was not far from doing likewise. The day was so mild that a westward window was open, and the faint exquisite scent of flowers and resinous branches stole through the rooms. The little company was collected in the front parlour in a semi-circle about the improvised altar.

The clergyman sat behind it. At his right was the Elder who was to assist in the service, his wife beside him. Mrs. de Baun was opposite, and next to her was the young mother. Sauchy was at Sarah’s other hand, arrayed in her Sunday grey alpaca, and next to her was Dick Walker. His mother had begged the privilege for him, and Mr. de Baun gravely seconded her motion in asking permission of the master of the house.

“It will please his mother, and she has been the kindest of friends to Sarah. We must not forget that!”

Nevertheless, the permission was granted grudgingly.

“It is but one more drop in the cup of humiliation!” groaned the parent, in yielding. “Yet an ex-convict is, maybe, the fittest guest we could have!”

The Dominie unclosed his lips, and then shut down his jaw, and clamped it fast. He did this so often in these latter days that lines were settling below the cheek-bones.

"My wife will be here, of course," he said, when he allowed himself to speak. "She will tell you, Mr. Van Dyck, how much gratified she is by your taking part in the service. Both of us thank you for letting Patsey's son come."

Mrs. de Baun, eyeing him narrowly, acknowledged that the "guest" looked and acted the gentleman, in paying his respects to the hosts and to herself. She liked, too, his cordial salutation to Sauchy, who smiled broadly in thrusting her hand into his. Nor did the watcher lose the warm flush of the handsome face at Patsey's entrance. She had the baby in her arms, and bore the burden with motherly tenderness. The Elder stepped to the Dominie's side, one finger upon the stem of the silver bowl. The Pastor arose, lifted his hand and bent his head:

"Let us pray!"

Jane had slipped in after Patsey, and they all knelt together—saint and sinner, bond and free, young and old.

Mrs. de Baun's arm stole around the slight form she felt was trembling from head to foot, while the ceremony proceeded.

"Benoni! I baptise thee in the name of THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY GHOST!"

The solemn echo was still in the air when Patsey carried the baby over to the grandmother, and held it up to her:

"You must be the first to kiss the little Christian!"

It was audacious, and had the attack been less sudden, it might have met the reproof the grandmother would have thought but just, had her sense of right and wrong been in working-order. As it was, at sight of the tiny head pillow'd in lace and flannel, the holy water glistening upon the forehead—the woman cried out passionately and caught the baby to her breast. Tears so blinded the sight of beholders that they saw but dimly the grand-

father kneel at his wife's side and join kisses and tears to hers.

Patsey stooped to take the child, and the old couple, with a common impulse, held out their arms to their daughter. Mr. de Baun motioned silently to the rest, and the three were left to themselves.

Sauchy claimed the baby, imperatively, and bore him off up-stairs. Mrs. de Baun and Patsey compared notes apart, and Mr. de Baun was thankful to relax the strain upon nerves and heart. Strolling into the yard, he happened full upon Dick Walker, who was mopping his face with his handkerchief. He laughed, shamefacedly:

"Never was so upset in my life!" he confessed. "Please Heaven, things will be a little easier for her now the old folks have come around! Good afternoon, Dominie! I got leave of absence for a couple of hours, and time must be about up. My mother will understand!"

He lifted his hat and ran down the hill.

The Dominie looked after him until the lithe figure disappeared at the turn beyond the bridge.

"Now, I wonder"—ran his musings—"if my wife is right after all! Or, am I?"

If the disowned daughter and the few friends left to her, built fair hopes upon the reconciliation brought about by the dramatic episode I have described, they were speedily undeceived. The erring one was tolerated upon Christian principles, when the excitement of the hour subsided. She might resume her place as co-worker with aunt and mother in the home, sit at table with the rest of the family, and take a share in the talk if she were so inclined. The attitude of her parents was distinctly and invariably judicial. No verbal allusion was made to the cause of her forfeiture of her former place and privileges. It was never lost sight of by father, mother

or brothers in her presence. She kept the child out of their way whenever it could be done, and except when the work in hand obliged her to be with them, kept him company.

“I don’t know that I love him better than other mothers love their children,” she said one day to Mrs. de Baun. “But I have so much more to make up to him for, you know!”

It was one of the very rare allusions to her peculiar lot that ever escaped her. Mrs. de Baun’s manner showed that she was ready to hear more, but that was the end of it. The girl’s inflexible reticence was a perplexity and a puzzle to all. Not even to this friend did she intimate, never so remotely, to whom she owed her fall. Surmise ran amuck on all sides. The imperturbable composure of the Corlaers went far, with a small minority, toward checking conjectures involving their name. Patsey’s stubborn disbelief in any tales reflecting dishonour upon the dead boy she had loved and championed, was discounted by her partiality for him and her well-known abhorrence of scandal. She called it “slander,” and frowned and scolded it down. The least scrupulous of the tribe she objurgated dared not interrogate her directly. If her steady loyalty to the ostracised fellow-woman set, here and there, a stealthy fire to creeping among the standing corn, it was usually trampled out by careless feet. Why seek further for fuel when they had enough?

It goes without saying that Sarah received no visits from former comrades, and made none. Her mother’s cronies never saw her when they called upon “poor Mrs. Van Dyck.” Jane learned to warn her of their approach, and Sauchy was the most savage of warders after she was told that her darling did not like to be seen by visitors other than the de Bauns and Patsey. It strained sensibly

upon the popularity of the Dominie and his spouse that they were persistent in kind treatment of, and neighbourly offices to, the Pariah. Matrons declared it to be a horrible object-lesson to young people. If all Christians imitated it, what would become of the morals of young men and maidens? It was an open shame that "the creature never darkened the door of a church." Since regular attendance upon the services of the sanctuary was a part of a Christian's duty, how could she expect to be taken back into full communion if she stayed away?

Rebecca Jane put the question flatly to Patsey, as to an accessory after the crime.

Patsey was hard at work upon Margarita Corlaer's seventh embroidered flannel petticoat, and did not lift her eyes from the pattern she was shaping.

"When I lived to Millville," she said, leisurely reminiscent, "there was a woman across the street who made quite a fortune by minding her own business. You never happened to meet her—did you?"

"I didn't come here to be insulted!" the mulatto snapped out.

"No? I ain't in the habit of givin' advice without it's asked for. If I was, I'd tell you to take your spiritual doubts an' difficulties straight to the Dominie. I don't think much of quacks of any sort, myself. When I'm out of order in body or in soul, I go to a real doctor."

If Sarah did not go straight to the Dominie to satisfy her conscience upon the mooted point, she came as near to it as her diffidence would let her approach. She opened her heart a very little way, to the Dominie's other self.

"If it's my duty to go to church, I will! But, you know how people will stare at me, and how they will

talk afterward! I feel as if it would *kill* me! I have thought—and prayed—over it many, many times, and I can't see my way clear to go—yet awhile! Mother tells everybody who questions her that I can't leave the baby. That isn't quite true, because Auntie would take care of him. Is it very wicked in me to dread the idea of meeting people?"

"Not wicked at all, my dear! It is perfectly natural. I should feel just the same. But—it is not good for you and the baby to take no open-air exercise. You ought to walk every fine day. And when the weather is warmer, it will be good for the little fellow to stay out-of-doors for several hours at a time. You can take him into the orchard, and spread a rug upon the grass, and let him roll and kick to his heart's content. I should like to see him rosy. He will never get colour in his cheeks if you keep him shut up like a cabbage in a cellar."

Thenceforward, on sunny days, the boy was duly aired and sunned, in his mother's arms, or in Sauchy's stronger embrace. He was two months old when his guardians had a joyous surprise in the form of a baby-carriage brought by the stage from Millville. The like had not been seen in Kinapeg since the Brouwer babies outgrew their perambulators.

Patsey Walker followed the stage all the way from her house, and panted up the hill in the wake of the driver.

"A birthday present from Me an' Dick!" she puffed, before the man was out of earshot. "Ben is just two months old to-day. Now, he shall take his rides abroad like a gentleman!"

Sauchy's rapture was unbounded. She sat up well into the small hours for three nights to cut down and make over her white shawl and an old fine linen sheet, and to cover a soft pillow, with which to furnish the

miniature coach. Mrs. de Baun's contribution to the outfit was a cloak her baby had outgrown, and Patsey's a dainty cap, the work of her skilful fingers.

Grandparents and bound-girl were attracted by the display, the first time the equipage was drawn up to the side-door to await the small occupant to-be.

Sauchy had deposited him in the prepared nest, and was tucking in the covering when her brother pushed her aside.

"Let me do it, Sauch! You ain't as used to it as I am."

The tone was gentle, and he tucked in and smoothed the coverlet with light and loving fingers, pulling it away from the baby's mouth as a final touch.

"Leave him room to breathe! The air's so soft and sweet to-day, it couldn't hurt a week-old baby!"

His hand brushed the child's chin. "Ben" opened wide eyes into those so near him, and laughed—the gurgle of innocent delight never heard save from baby-lips.

"The first time he has laughed!" cried Patsey, in ecstasy. "An' *you* made him do it! Bless his dear little heart!"

It was the event of the day, and sent a glow into the farmer's heart he had not known since his first-born was laid in his arms. Of his own accord he kissed his daughter, and cautioned her not to walk too far in the sun.

"You must take care of yourself, if you want to keep him well."

"An' a little child shall lead them!" Bible-reading Patsey quoted to herself on the way home. "The word of the Lord abideth forever!"

Sauchy would let nobody draw the carriage but herself, and the mother walked silently beside it, more peaceful than she had believed she could ever be again. The hope

of regaining her father's love was like the caress of a soft hand upon her aching heart. She must ever be an outcast from other homes. That she accepted as irremediable. An indelible brand, blacker than that stamped by divine wrath upon Cain, disfigured her for life. She could not get away from the terrible fact. Strolling over the orchard grass, dappled by the April sunshine falling through the sparsely-clothed boughs, she recalled, without apparent sequence (was it a hundred years ago, or less than one year?), the June night when Will Corlaer had led her away from the group clustered about the front door in the moonlight, to "look at the North Star;" when she had leaned upon her father's knee, his hand playing in her hair while Norman Lang sang "Mary of Argyle;" when the doting father had praised her for "knowing more than the teacher;" the night she had said—"You see, I have never had a sorrow!"

She reckoned herself the happiest girl alive, then. If there were one more wretched than she upon the earth now, God pity her! She did not know that she had spoken the prayer audibly until Sauchy stooped to peer under the hood of the carriage.

"Boy?" she queried, solicitously.

Sarah shook her head and forced a smile. What a blessed thing it would be for *her* if she had but one imaginable source of anxiety! She aroused herself now, to notice that the carriage lurched jerkily upon the uneven turf. At the upper end of the orchard a gate gave upon the high road, and, a few yards higher up on the other side of the way, was another gate opening into pasture-lands where the going would be smoother. Sauchy nodded acquiescence to the suggestion of the changed route. She perceived, too, that the precious passenger had been jostled somewhat out of place in the passage among the

hummocks, and that the pillows had slipped aside. Outside of the gate she halted to rectify the disorder. The fence was masked, for a long way up and down, by a hedge of self-planted savins. In the shelter of this Sauchy took the child up and handed him to his mother while she should rearrange his bed. Had an artist chanced that way he would have lingered longingly over the picture thrown into relief by the dark-green background.

Mrs. de Baun and Patsey had observed without comment that Sarah had worn no bright colours for months past—only black and white. She had put on a white gown that morning, the weather being unseasonably warm, and her straw hat had fallen back upon her shoulders. The boy was evidently in a holiday mood. She never looked sad when his gaze was upon her. Nor had one of the tears that were her meat night and day, ever fallen upon his face. She had a fancy that they would “not be good for him.” Patsey had told her once that to “cry over a baby would bring bad luck.”

Heavy-hearted as she was, she smiled down at him when he unclosed sleepy eyelids and recognised who held him. He was a wise baby for his months, and already knew both of his votaries.

“Look, Aunty! he almost laughed again!”

Sauchy’s tall, gaunt form straightened up so abruptly as to scare the horse ridden by the foremost of a group of equestrians, whose coming was muffled by the dusty highway.

“Look out, there! *you!*” shrilled a woman’s voice.

Carrie Corlaer’s mount was dancing sideways, across the road, unwilling to pass the carriage and the apparition beside it. Her attendant had seized the bridle, and was speaking soothingly to the frightened animal. The halt gave the rest of the party time to join them.

Sarah shrank so far back into her screen that the stiff evergreens scratched her cheeks.

Rhoda Brouwer, and a man whom Sarah did not know, were close upon Carrie and her betrothed, and not far behind rode Margarita and Norman Lang.

The six were massed for a few dizzy seconds before the eyes of the cringing spectator. All saw her. It was impossible not to espy what had caused the violent plunge of the horse and the rider's fight with him.

It was over in a half-minute. As one fascinated by the Evil Eye, the girl-mother met the rapid scrutiny that swept her and her companions. The women's stare was keen and scornful; the stranger laughed lightly; the other men raised their hats; George Adrain with a merry smile at the awkward rustics who had put his lady-love in peril. Norman Lang bowed gravely, with no more sign of recognition than Adrain had showed.

They were gone! The only token of their passing was the cloud of dust floating in the sunshine.

Saucy reared herself to her fullest height and shook her fist after the party, a torrent of Dutch and mongrel expletives rushing from her foaming lips. Then she stooped to gather up handfuls of dust, and hurled it after them. Without entering into the deeper significance of the behaviour of the ill-mannered women, she had seen that they sneered at her best-belovèd, and passed her by without sign of recognition. If curses could have killed, not one of the six would have reached home alive.

A low moaning quelled the storm. Sarah had sunk to the ground and lay groaning, as in mortal pain. Not wholly unconscious, for she had not loosed her hold of the baby. But she did not speak as her aunt took him away from her and laid him back in the carriage. Saucy had treated fainting women before, and did not dally for

a moment now. There was a spring in the pasture, and she jumped the fence, instead of taking the longer way by the gate. She soaked her handkerchief and her apron in the water and sped back to her helpless charges, with the dripping cloths.

The hard-featured visage bent over her, as the darkness cleared from Sarah's vision at the douche of cold water upon forehead and cheeks, hurried the return of her scattered senses.

"I didn't hurt the baby—did I?" she faltered, trying to rise.

"Boy good! Sleep!"

"That is right. Thank you!" She closed her eyes and was still until aroused by the bustle of Sauchy's dragging the carriage into the orchard. She returned when it was accomplished, and the boy left in the shade.

"Get up!" she ordered, passing an arm under her niece and raising her to her feet. "Back soon!" a motion of her head in the direction the riders had taken. "*Then!*"

Emphasis and pantomime told as forcibly as words could have done what treatment the insolent crew might expect at her hands.

By slow and painful degrees, they retraced the route to the house. Slowly and with difficulty, Sarah told her mother that the "walk and the heat had been too much for her. She would feel better for a rest in her room."

Mrs. Van Dyck offered a bit of advice.

"Leave the baby down here! He can lie in his carriage under the cherry-tree, and Sauchy watch him while she's doin' her darnin'. You ought not to nurse him while you are so tired. You look fair beat out!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

MARGARITA CORLAER was an early visitor to the Parsonage on the forenoon succeeding the incident recorded in our last chapter. Repose of manner was never a characteristic of the vivacious young woman. To-day she was a-thrill with joyous excitement.

"I have so much to tell you that I don't know where to begin!" was the prelude. She had plumped herself down in the easiest chair in the room and squared knees and elbows for work. "In the first place, Mr. de Baun will have a formal call or letter from Norman some time to-day, asking him to perform the ceremony on the third of May. That is barely a fortnight off. If that isn't 'wedding haste,' I don't know the meaning of the words. You may well look surprised! Things have happened so thick and fast, I am positively dizzy! You haven't heard, I suppose, that Norman has received the appointment of Professor of Chemistry in Volumnia University? He met the President of the Board of Trustees in Germany last winter, who took a great fancy to him. They travelled together for a week or so, and the upshot of the matter is that Norman is to fill the chair the late incumbent was good enough to vacate by dying. This settled, and the mission on which Norman went abroad accomplished—to Father's infinite satisfaction, I may add—there is no conceivable reason why we should not be married out-of-hand. It will be a very quiet affair, of course, in the circumstances—being in mourning and all

that—but we must put up with the inevitable. It is to be a double wedding, and as I tell mother, the three families and relatives will fill the house to overflowing, and it won't be so stupid after all.

"She ought to be glad to get it all off her hands—poor dear! Norman was so shocked to see how changed she is, that he could hardly speak. He says she looks twenty years older than when he went away, and that Father is awfully broken. That is the worst of having an only son. He leaves such a gap if he dies.

"We have crowded on a full head of steam in consequence of Norman's impatience. He takes possession of the chair the first week of June, and the wedding-tour will be short enough as it is. We shall board until fall.

"I am carried away with delight at the idea of living in a big city.

"Father has promised to see that my share of Grandma's estate is put into available shape, so we can use it. Professors' salaries are miserably meagre, everywhere. I am very ambitious for Norman, but not more than he is for himself. He aspires to become the President of a college some day. And to make scientific discoveries and write books about them—and all that. You must read the series he is preparing for *The Scientific American* when the papers come out. I showed you the article he wrote for the *Meridian Magazine*, you may remember? And how fine Mr. de Baun thought it was? Sometimes, I can't believe that I am to join my fortunes with such a man."

She blinked away a tear of genuine feeling.

"I congratulate you with all my heart!" The hostess slipped in her quota to the dialogue. "Mr. Lang has unusual talent, and qualities of disposition and manner that endear him to all who come under his influence.

You may reasonably anticipate a brilliant career for him. He left his mark upon our neighbourhood. We shall miss him for many a long day."

Margarita darted forward to drop a kiss, like the peck of a bird, upon the cheek nearest her.

"You *dear* thing! I was sure of your sympathy and good wishes. Every rose has a thorn, you know, and I must say I was disappointed at the way in which Rhoda Brouwer received my invitation to be one of my bridesmaids. Would you believe it? She took it quite as a matter of course; although she was 'somewhat surprised,' she said, 'at the early double wedding, our affliction being so recent.' It sounds uncharitable, but I couldn't help wondering if she were not a bit jealous? Not that she ever wanted Norman—but it does seem rather unfair that both of us are to be married—and married so well, when she and Ruth have no prospect of it, so far as we can judge.

"To be sure—" mellowing in accent and expression in the desire to give her friend the benefit of the circumstances—"she had a man from the city with her in our horseback ride. A Mr. Carson, rather nice-looking, and with the manners of a gentleman—so far as I could judge."

"I have met him. As you say, he appears to be pleasant and gentlemanly. Who were in your party? It was a fine day for horseback exercise."

"There were six of us; Norman and I; Carrie and George Adrain; Rhoda and Mr. Carson. We rode ten miles down the Valley, crossed the mountain and returned through Meadowvale. And by the way—" interrupting herself sharply—"such a disagreeable thing happened on our way back! Just outside of the Van Dycks' orchard-gate we happened right upon Sarah, holding her child in

her arms! Imagine it! And that *awful* Sauchy, fussing with a baby-cart, or something of the sort. They were hidden by the bushes until we were close to them! Carrie's horse was frightened by the old woman or the cart—or both together!" laughing. "I didn't blame him, for she looked like the witch of Endor! She glared at us as if she wanted to bite us.

"Sarah slunk back into the savins, but I could see that she was pale and scared to death. George quieted the horse in a minute and we rode on. You can fancy it was as awkward as anything could be. I haven't set eyes upon that girl for months. Not since she was—laid up! I did hope she would have the decency to keep herself out of sight forever. I was *furious* with her for making a show of her shame on the public road! As a matter of course, we pretended not to recognise her. But that hag of an aunt could not be ignored. George asked Carrie if 'that wasn't the scare-crow that burst into the dining-room the night Will carried her off to look for a lost child?' Carrie said 'Yes,' and changed the subject. She suspected he had heard the scandal, and guessed who Sarah was. Norman behaved splendidly! Father had told him the horrid story, so Mother says. Naturally, Norman and I can't allude to it. But I could see he was distressed at sight of the party.

"He was kindness itself to the girl, and indeed to the entire family. He consulted Father last night as to the propriety of calling upon them. Father agreed with him that it would be very painful, all around, to see them in such changed circumstances, but thought it would be a kindness to those two poor old people. He advised him to write to Mrs. Van Dyck, asking when it would be convenient for her and her husband to see him, and expressing a wish to meet them again, for the sake of old times—

and all that. He can't very well stay away. He wouldn't wound them for the world. But there are Sauchy and Sarah!"

She laughed again.

"He need have no apprehensions on that head," replied Mrs. de Baun, dryly. The girl's flippancy grated upon her sensibilities. "He is not likely to see the aunt. It is certain he will not see the niece. She is never out of her room in the evening, or at any other time when visitors may call. She is a confirmed recluse."

"I wish I could drop a hint to Norman to that effect. But that is not to be thought of—in our present relations. Odd—wasn't it? that I should have tried so hard to keep that girl straight—and failed so signally?"

"Very strange—and unspeakably sad!" Mrs. de Baun's gravity deepened with the progress of the narrative. "I am more sorry for the poor, misguided child than for any one else alive. I cannot trust myself to talk of it. I hope Mr. Lang will go to see the friends who made a home for him for so long. It will be a comfort to the father and mother, and it may tend to strengthen the influence he exerted over the boys while he was one of the family. How long a visit does he pay to you?"

The diversion was effectual. For the next hour, the bride-elect catalogued and described in detail her wardrobe, and the contents of the linen-chest stocked by her mother in accordance with the good old Holland custom; rattled off the list of to-be-invited guests; the plans for the wedding-feast, etcetera, encouraged by what she mistook for rapt interest on the part of the confidante.

"And all the while, I had the picture in my mind of that other girl, hiding from the sight of her kind in the wayside thicket!" she told her husband when the ordeal was over. "It is the first of numberless trials through

which she will have to pass—God help her! I can think how the cold stare of the women she had not seen in so long, cut her to the soul. It prefigured what she must endure for the remainder of her life. I could pray that it may be short. And she was *so* grateful for the little wagon! Patsey told me of it last night. I am afraid she will be afraid to go out with it again. I must say that I am disappointed in Norman Lang. Margarita says none of them spoke to the two women by the fence. I thought him a truer man! He might have recollected the kindness he received from the Van Dycks in the old times."

"I do the fellow more justice than to take Margarita's words without a pinch of salt," the Dominie said, stubbornly. "I believe he bowed, if he did not speak. He is no cad! I shall make it my business to establish that fact at the earliest opportunity."

He had it before the day was over.

Standing in the "Confessional," an hour before sunset, trimming away the brittle sticks of last year's hop-vines, and marking with satisfaction the thriftiness of new shoots, he heard a springy step upon the path leading to the gate behind him, and recognised it before turning to meet the returned wanderer. The latter was in fine physical trim, and in spirits becoming a prospective bridegroom. He had not needed the external polish imparted to the educated by foreign travel. But he looked more the man and gentleman for the experience of the past half-year. The sunny smile and frank friendliness were the same that had won hearts from his youth up. The Dominie could have taken him in his arms, as he held him in feeling to his heart, in the cordial handclasp which was the warmest greeting permitted by American Social Usages.

Lang had but half-an-hour to spare, he stated at once, with rising colour that brightened the smile.

"So, we will dispense with preliminaries, and proceed to business."

"A visit my wife had this morning enables me to expedite that still further," was the rejoinder. "I went through the operation myself, a dozen years ago. The dull-witted parson did not abridge the agony by so much as a half-syllable. The recollection inclines me to be merciful with you. I am to make you the happiest man living, upon the third of May. With all my heart, my dear fellow! And may your married life be as bright and peaceful as mine has been!"

Lang put out his hand impulsively:

"I thank you from the depths of my soul! I am glad you are to have the office, and no other man. And you could ask nothing more of Heaven for me than what you have implied."

They sat down then, and talked of other things of interest to both, until Norman glanced at the westerling sun.

"How often I have watched it go down over that straight-browed mountain! It is good to see it again! But it means now that I am due elsewhere than here. May I pay my respects to Mrs. de Baun before I go?"

The host arrested him:

"May I ask if you have called yet upon the Van Dycks?"

A shadow swept over the clear eyes. The lips tightened in pain before Norman answered with feeling that did him honour:

"I have written to ask if I might perform that harrowing duty this evening. It will be such a trial to us

all that I would shirk it if I could consistently with my sense of obligation to old friends. You think that I ought to go—don't you?"

"I do, undoubtedly! Being what you are, you could do no less. You will probably—I might say, 'certainly'—see Mr. and Mrs. Van Dyck, and possibly the sons. Nobody else. The hateful story is familiar to you, of course. I have no disposition to enter into particulars beyond assuring you, who were her teacher and friend, in by-gone days, that there never was a more sincere penitent. You saw her yesterday, I hear?"

"Surely she—*they*—said nothing?"—began Lang, in surprise.

The Dominie anticipated the rest.

"Margarita mentioned the meeting to my wife—as was right and natural. I was somewhat sorry that, in the surprise of the encounter, the party passed the two women without any sign of recognition—"

"I beg your pardon! You are mistaken there. Adrain and I raised our hats, as we would to any acquaintance. Had I been alone—or with yourself, Mr. de Baun,"—a slight and graceful inclination of the head implying more than the words expressed—"I should have stopped and spoken to them. I owe too much to that family to slight them, even in seeming. As you say, the subject is exquisitely painful, and discussion would do no good. I have few correspondents here, and those were not likely to write to me of such things. I had not heard of it until I landed in this country. You may imagine my horror and incredulity!"

"But time presses! May I see Mrs. de Baun for five minutes?"

She met them upon the front porch, and he would not enter the house.

If he had, they would have missed the sight of the most stirring event that broke the even current of Kina-peg during that month.

The de Bauns had attended the visitor to the gate, and were exchanging last words with him over it, when far down the straight turnpike in the direction of the village, they heard the thunder of hoofs and the roll of wheels upon the bridge. A dog-cart they knew for Rhoda Brouwer's, was lunging madly up the road. Two figures were in it, and the blooded horse between the shafts was beyond control. Afterward it transpired that the reins had been carelessly buckled and came loose in Rhoda's hands, one slipping from her hold to the ground. Her companion was her father, but no mortal power could manage the frenzied animal after the flapping rein struck him.

Instinctively, Mr. de Baun and Norman rushed toward the middle of the road in the wild hope of checking the flight, but before the cart reached them a man had leaped like a greyhound from the field on the other side of the way, and thrown himself upon the flying horse. He grasped the bit with both hands, and hung to it with force that brought the animal to his knees. His captor was under him, but the desperate clutch upon the creature's mouth did not relax. The two men from the Parsonage and three others who were passing, flew to the rescue. The occupants of the cart were unhurt, and, with rare presence of mind, joined the band engaged in freeing their deliverer from the tangle of legs, head and harness binding him down. Not until he was dragged to the side of the road, did the Pastor recognise Dick Walter.

Rhoda sat flat upon the turf and took the dusty, bleeding head upon her lap, wiping away the grime with her handkerchief, tears raining down her cheeks. One man

raced off for the doctor; in the distance Mrs. de Baun and Rebecca Jane appeared with water and restoratives, and Mr. Brouwer's first connected words were an order to a servant from his own house to go for Mrs. Walker. By the time Patsey gained the scene of the disaster, her son, still unconscious, was being borne upon an impromptu stretcher, constructed of a barn-gate and blankets, to the Brouwer mansion.

There he lay in the state guest-chamber for three weeks, while Nature and Dr. Ten Eyck were busy mending a broken leg, a gash of the scalp, and bruises without number.

Timothy O. held to no half-way measures in any undertaking. This lad had saved his life and his daughter's life and limb. For this service no adequate compensation could be made. He—and his—could, would and must testify their gratitude by every conceivable means. He would have pensioned Patsey for life if she would have allowed it. Receiving (and honouring her for it) her gentle but decided refusal to accept alms while she was able to earn her living, he set his strenuous wits to work upon the more hopeful task of forwarding the interests of "that noble young man" whose praises he never wearied of chanting.

He paid daily visits to the state bed-room—short at first, and longer as "the boy" regained strength and ought to be amused, and convinced himself that there was "fine stuff" in him. Stuff too fine to be wasted in a Kina-pegs office, even in the employ of Wilhelmus Corlaer. Moreover, the fellow ought to have a chance to prove his mettle in a new environment. There were meddlesome and malicious gossips in this township who would be ready to throw mud at him if he ever got a creditable footing in the world. He could never do himself justice

here—confound the uncharitableness of small places, everywhere!

It would be a waste of space and time to relate that disquisition and objurgation and castle-building went on most vigorously in the third-story “study” diagonally opposite the house. It is as unnecessary to add that the listener, albeit Dick Walker’s fast, and upon occasions, fierce friend—was, now and then, bored by the boom of the big voice when it heaped illustration upon assertion in reminiscent details of his own rise and progress.

Dick, paler and thinner than of old, but light of heart and sanguine in spirit, went to the office and bent every energy to the accustomed task. The Corlaer sisters were married and away. The water-fall and the trip-hammer kept time in sonorous measures; business grew brisk and slackened by turns, and pay-day rolled around in hebdomadal order.

The young man’s outward world was in nothing different from that in which he had lived and toiled before the “accident” that laid him up, with breath and senses beaten out of him, in the state and pomp of the Brouwer guest-chamber. But the monologues his host styled “conversations,” had had their effect. It was not the first time the expediency of a change of scene and action had fretted itself into his mind. He was growing fast intellectually, and his outlook widened steadily. Sometimes the strait confines of the treadmill strangled him. And he had glimpses through the door Mr. Brouwer had set ajar, that drove him wild with ungratified longing.

All this he poured out to his mother in a turbulent flood on the night succeeding the momentous day of Timothy O.’s visit to the office in Mr. Corlaer’s absence. He was equipped with a definite proposition to the clerk

which, he said, had been submitted to his present employer and received his sanction.

The New York branch of the business in which Mr. Brouwer retained a controlling interest, although his son was the manager, had established a house in Buffalo, N. Y., in which the senior partner believed young Walker could be useful and make for himself a career. Dick had mastered the project in full, but he did not vex his mother's unlettered soul with particulars or general principles. Enough for her to know that, if the arrangement were concluded, he would have to leave home and her for a term of months. By and by, he would, of course, send for her.

"It would not be home without you," he said, with a quaver in his voice. "If I ever make anything of myself, it will be your work."

"You will have a wife some day, who may not want an old frump like me in her house."

Patsey had been swallowing her tears ever since the story began. She succeeded in the trick so well that her bantering tone was quite natural.

She was utterly stunned by the quiet rejoinder.

"There will be one woman in the world for me—if I live a hundred years! And she loves you already."

The mother gazed at him with frightened eyes.

"My boy! my boy! you *can't* mean it!"

"I never meant anything more truly, Mother! We won't talk about it now. But, when I go away, I leave her to you. Take care of her for me."

He kissed her silently, and went out into the night.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO years and three months after the private christening in the front parlour of the homestead, the countryside gathered in force to attend Sauchy Van Dyck's funeral.

The last stage of her life was characteristically brief. She had done a long day's ironing; lent a strong hand to the tasks in which she was drilling Jane's successor; dished supper; set sponge for the morrow's baking; undressed Ben, and laid him in his crib (a privilege she would resign to no one) and sought her own bed, apparently in her usual health.

Not hearing her moving about the house at her accustomed hour, Sarah went to her room, and found her still "asleep."

"Life must have been extinct for several hours," pronounced Dr. Ten Eyck. "The indications are that dissolution supervened upon cerebral hemorrhage."

The sister-in-law added—"She never wasted time in doin' anythin'!"

She lay at rest at last in the archway separating front and back parlours. Patsey Walker and Mrs. de Baun had aided Sarah in arranging the wealth of flowers gathered from many gardens. They garlanded the arch into a bower, and wove a frame for the coffin. A great cluster of blush-roses hid the ghastly white cotton gloves into which the undertaker's wife, who was his unsalaried assistant, had thrust the toil-hardened hands. They had "laid her out" in the black silk dress she had worn to

funerals, and on Christmas and Thanksgiving, for twenty years. Sarah's loving care had wound the snow-white hair into a halo.

"A crown of glory!" whispered she, as Mrs. de Baun remarked how it softened and refined the rugged features. "She is wearing one now in Heaven."

Parlours, sitting-room and lower hall were filled with a reverent throng.

One look at the moveless sleeper, transformed out of their recognition by the great peace resting upon brow and lips, like the mysterious shining of an unseen Presence, sent the most careless back to their seats, awed and silent.

The family was secluded from general observation in the roomy upper hall. Mrs. de Baun and Patsey had taken their places with the mourners, without asking permission. They belonged there, as a matter of right. Ben, arrayed in a white frock, sat upon Patsey's bombazine knee, chastened into silence by the prevailing sadness he could not comprehend. He had never seen his mother cry until yesterday when she tried to tell him that "Auntie had gone up into the sky, to get a beautiful home ready for them, when God called them, too. He had sent for her, because she was so good that the dear angels could not spare her any longer. He must be a good boy, and never forget her."

He was a bright little fellow, and his mother had trained him diligently in Bible-stories and Bible-teachings. But the human vocabulary that would convey the sublime truths of immortality and the "glory to be revealed" to the unclothed and unfettered soul, is pitifully meagre. Ben gleamed just enough to enable him to divine that he must be quiet and not ask questions until Mamma had time to tell him what it all meant. Patsey had

brought him a woolly lamb Dick had bought for him in New York, on his way to the funeral. Next to "Aunt Patsey," Ben loved "Dicky" better than any other visitor to the house. If he would behave very well, she would take him to her house to supper that evening, to see his friend who was going away to-morrow morning. The prospect secured silence and propriety of behaviour for the next hour. As an additional bribe—disapproved of by his grandmother, although of this he was in blissful ignorance—he was allowed to hold the woolly lamb while the services proceeded.

He had been used to "regular attendance" upon family worship, and recognised instinctively the tone in which the Dominie stationed below in the well of the staircase, said—"Let us pray!" Patsey was moved by the child's ready action in slipping from her lap to his knees, and not scandalised that he carried the woolly lamb, still hugged in his arms. But when he would have lifted up his voice in concert with those down-stairs, in the funeral hymn, she clapped her hand over his mouth, and his mother said in his ear—"Don't sing now, dear! I will tell you all about it by-and-by!"

The big blue eyes brimmed with tears. He had a marvellously quick ear for music, and loved it with all his soul.

"Can carry a tune as well as you could!" the grandfather had boasted to the Dominie. "But so could Sarah at his age! She and I used to sing together when she was two-and-a-half."

Ben's spirit was dashed by the prohibition, but he did not cry outright as his grandmother had feared he would, in seeing the by-play. She admitted only, that the boy "had been taught to mind, for all he was so spoiled by Sauchy."

She had never tolerated the idolatry of her husband's sister for her niece and her niece's illegitimate child. In the virtuous matron's sight, the righteous would condone iniquity by a show of decent civility to the transgressor. She had never temporized with the "exceeding sinfulness" of her flesh-and-blood. The ice-wall dividing them had thinned at the christening-service, only to congeal with second thoughts of Christian duty and parental responsibility.

Mother and daughter were no nearer to one another to-day than they were three years ago. In her prayers and to her own soul, the mother honestly termed her constant remembrance of the sin and of the penalty it merited, "bearing testimony to the truth of her religion." In which pious persuasion the excellent dame has more sympathisers than I care to speak of.

The text of the funeral sermon was—"She hath done what she could."

The Dominie never indulged in flights of rhetoric. He could not have done this now. Assuming that all present were familiar with the circumstances under which the words were spoken by the Master, he came at once to the pith of the subject they suggested—the range and the limit of human endeavour. Dismissing generalities in four sentences, he applied the plaudit of the All-wise and All-merciful to the life of the woman whose death had called them to the house of mourning.

"You all knew her. Afflicted from her birth by mental infirmity that shut her out from the sphere occupied by the average woman, the loves and activities that make up the sum of the life of the wife and mother—she yet filled her narrowed circuit of affection and duty *full!* Whatsoever her hand found to do was done with her might. She had a great, warm heart, and kindness flowed out from

it upon the suffering who came within her reach. So far as she knew what was right, she did it. Fearless and faithful, she shirked no hardships; she feared nothing that opposed her effort to set wrong right. She loved helpless children; where she saw want and pain, she wrought with all her strength to relieve it. Where she loved, it was with her whole heart and soul. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend,' declared the God-man Who proved His love for sinners upon the Cross. This great love this woman had for those of her blood and name, and for the few who saw through the outward seeming into the caged beautiful soul within, and permitted her to love them. I speak that which I know, of her capacity for affection and sacrifice. She never spared herself when there was work to be done for the comfort and happiness of others. Day by day, month by month, year by year, she put into diligent practice the second commandment which the Master pronounced to be 'like unto the First and Great law' of life. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' She went further—she loved and served those about her as she never loved and served herself. To the utmost of her ability, she did what she could. How many of us could look into the face of Him before whom all hearts are naked and open—as she does to-day—and plead, 'O Lord! so far as I knew my duty to Thee and to my fellow-creatures, I did it?'

"He knows why she did not openly confess herself His servant and, calling herself by His name, let all know why she laboured and endured and loved. So far as she could know Him, she obeyed and served. The angels are her teachers now—blessèd be His holy name!

"Dear friends! shall we not take to our hearts the lesson of this beloved sister's life, and strive to win the

plaudit which, I devoutly and joyfully believe, she has heard before now—"Well done, good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of thy Lord!"

"The services will be concluded at the grave."

Above the subdued bustle of the professional preparations for the removal of the remains below-stairs, arose a childish wail:

"Mamma! mamma! don't cwy! I will be *very* good!"

And more than one listener murmured with answering tears: "Poor little fellow! he has lost *his* best friend!"

Rhoda Brouwer Carson's voice echoed it, in shaking hands with Dick Walker outside of the door where the crowd divided to let the mourners pass to the carriages.

"It was beautiful to see her devotion to him!" she pursued, feelingly. "I thought, while Mr. de Baun was speaking, how willingly she would have laid down her life for him—and for Sarah too, for that matter. There is nobody to take her place for them.

"*Must* you go back, to-morrow?" in the same rapid "aside" but with a changed manner. "I am here for a few days. You *must* run in to see us! Father will never forgive you if you don't!"

Dick's mind was too full of graver matters for musings upon the turn of Fortune's wheel which had made it natural and proper for the daughter of the great man of the Valley to invite him to her home, as she might her equal. Had he reflected, furthermore, that he was more nearly on a par with her, socially, than her father had been with regard to *his* employer's daughter when he entered his store as a porter, forty-odd years ago—he might have been amused, for Dick had a fair sense of humour.

He had eyes and thought now only for the slender black-robed figure appearing in the doorway. Her father and mother preceded her; her brothers slouched lazily behind her. Dick's face burned to the roots of his bared curls at the unmanly neglect. Disdainful of wondering eyes, he darted forward and handed her into the mourning coach before the tardy undertaker could perform the office. Patsey and Mrs. de Baun were close to the ill-mannered brothers, and he caught a glance of warning from one, and of cordial approval from the other. Encouraged by it, he stood at the lady's side until the next coach moved up, then passed her into it. She breathed a word in his ear in accepting the courtesy:

"You are a brave, *true* man, Dick! I am proud of you!"

His mother said the same in effect to him after their return from the church-yard. Dinner was over and they sat in the shade of their own grape-vine, overlooking the river. At the right of the old stone house was a field of clover in pinkest bloom.

Such affluence of perfume arose from the nodding globes that, as Patsey said, "one could almost see the scent in the air." Dick had his pipe; his mother her knitting.

"Shirt for Ben's winter outfit," she explained. "I began in time, so's to be sure to have the set done before frost. I'm havin' quite a lazy spell for me this summer. Margarita Lang was at her father's last week, fine as a fiddle an' gay as a lark. Carrie, she comes home about every month. Carrie's baby needed the salt air and they are stayin' at a hotel at Long Branch for a spell. Margarita talks of the White Mountains soon after Commencement. Havin' no baby to tie *her* down, she can scamper about the country as she likes. You wouldn't

catch either of *them* puttin' herself out of the way to come to the funeral of an old neighbour! It's done the Van Dycks no end of good to see the respect paid to the family. The old man was tickled out of his boots when I told him you had travelled all night on a-purpose to attend the funeral. I should think he'd be ashamed of those hulkin', no-mannered sons of his'n—lettin' their only sister walk out of the house by herself, and, but for you, climb into the carriage with nobody to lend a hand! I was proud that you stepped forward as you did! Mrs. de Baun spoke of it afterward."

"It was an act of common politeness. Any man with a spark of right feeling would have done the same." He laid down his pipe and kissed her: "Mother! she is lovelier than ever! She is a saint purified by the fires. I heard something to-day that makes me impatient. The Van Dycks are going to sell the farm and house and move, bag and baggage, to Millville. The boys swear they are sick to death of farming, and a cousin of theirs who is in the lumber business in Millville wants them to put in capital and go into it with him. That is why the place is to be sold. The old man is as weak as water at the best, and ready to agree to anything the boys propose. He is too feeble to run the farm alone, and his wife has fretted her senses out worrying over her troubles.

"But I am telling you what you know already?"

A vehement nod assented. Patsey caught up the word: "Neither of them has ever been the same since Case ran away. Everythin' has gone crooked. The farm didn't pay, an' the mill burned down, and Case had made away with more money than they knew of at first. There's a mortgage on the farm—an' now Sauchy's gone, things will all be at sixes an' sevens. Sarah—poor child! works her fingers' ends off to stop leaks, but I don' be-

lieve one of those lazy louts of brothers has earn't the salt to his bread for three years back. Another thing—I'm sure, as if she had told me, that Mrs. Van Dyck knows in her heart that the skeleton found on the mountain over yonder was her son. I am positive Sarah thinks so. Several times I've found flowers laid on the grave in the pauper's section of the church-yard, and once when I'd spied her stealin' away, the back way, the flowers were as fresh as if they had been just picked, an' I knew the roses for the same that grow in the Van Dycks' garden. Of course, I've never said a word of it before, an' as for speakin' to her, or openin' her mouth to me on the subject—that couldn't be! She'd be cut into bits before she'd let on about anything she felt it was right to keep to herself. She's proved *that!*"

"Like the brick she is! I've done some pretty hard thinking to-day. The hardest since I saw how she was treated by those who ought to be her protectors against the rest of the world, no matter what happens. When I put her into the carriage on the way to see her best friend buried out of her sight, it was all I could do to keep from taking her in my arms and carrying her off to a home where she would be respected and loved, as she deserves to be. I registered a vow four years ago, that if it ever lay in my power to prove my gratitude for her angelic treatment of me—a skulking jail-bird who dared not look a respectable man or woman in the face—I'd do it to the best of my ability. And please God, I'll keep my word!"

"I have loved her better and better every year since that day. For a long time, I did not presume to think of anything more than the worship I might show to an angel from heaven. When the storm came, I wanted to fight the whole of Kinapeg for her. When I saw ahead

of me the prospect of independence in a new place where our history—hers and mine—would never be known—I took another solemn oath. I would snatch her out of the horrible pit and the miry clay in which she is living, and we would begin a new life together. Her child shall think I am his father. He shall take my name, and have the education of a gentleman. I've dreamed and planned and worked and saved all these years with this one end in view, and I'll carry it through—so help me God!"

He had her in a bear-like hug by now, and talked on so fast she would not interrupt him.

"You will live with us, and we'll be the very happiest family in Buffalo. Now, I'll tell you something I have never let you guess. I wrote to her, last Christmas, and made a clean breast of all this. I begged her not to answer if there was the faintest hope that I might bring her around to my way of thinking. Just to write '*Letter received*' on a card, and address it to me. If the case was absolutely hopeless, she must write at once frankly and put me out of my misery. All I asked was that she would think long and seriously of what I had said. In a week, I had the card—'*Letter received*.' Not another word. As I read it, that spells '*Hope*!'

"Now, here is my scheme. You say Ben is coming to supper. Step around, and ask her to bring him—say, a little before sunset. Manage to keep her until I show up, and then coax Ben down to the river to see the minnows dart under the bridge. Isn't there somebody to take her place at home, if she should stay to supper?"

"Sally Barnes is there for the day. Mrs. de Baun sent her with orders to save Sarah all she could. I'll arrange on the quiet to have her clear up after supper, and leave the old lady comfortable, if I should happen to persuade Sarah to wait here until the boy is ready to go home.

"I'm a fool—and I know it! to give in to all this!" she concluded, between laughing and crying. "But, *there!* You could talk the legs off an iron pot! *Will* you listen to the way that river is bubblin' an' gigglin', as if it understood what we are sayin'? I don't wonder it is amused!"

Dick, calling in due form upon Mrs. Carson at four o'clock, had the surprise of his life. That energetic matron received him as she might a young brother. Her father was not at home. Business had summoned him to Millville at noon. He would be back to-morrow.

"Do you know he is as proud of you as if he had discovered a new variety of the *genus homo*," she rattled on in the old style. "Now, you are going to tell me all about yourself, personally. I don't care a sou marquee for business. I hope you are thinking of marrying before long? If you don't, you will cheat some girl out of a first-class article of husband. So good a son would make a none-such of a husband."

The door was wide open and Dick walked in without demur.

Rhoda's genius for leadership and her love of sensational effects were tow-and-tinder to the applied match of the romantic tale. She was no prude, and, as a wedded wife, she could allude openly to the formidable obstacle in the course of true love. Dick swept it aside with a flood of disdainful protestation. Lured on by her undisguised warmth of sympathy, he unfolded the details of the dream in which he had lived and had all the being worth having, ever since the girl shook hands with him in the sight of the post-office loungers in the broad light of day, and said she was glad to see him at home again.

Rhoda hearkened with glowing interest to his untaught eloquence. As he wound up the narrative with the "So

help me, God!" he did not recollect he had used already that afternoon—Mrs. Carson pressed both hands to her temples:

"Wait a minute!" She shut her eyes tightly, and Dick was awed into dumbness.

Her brain was struggling in the birth-throes of a big thought. It came with a rush:

"If I were you, Dick Walker, I'd marry her this very day! *There* is the Parsonage and she hasn't a better friend than the Dominie. Don't give her time to think! Go to her, like the man you are, and tell her that the one, only and best thing for you both is to be made one in the sight of God and His angels, before you are twelve hours older. You will say you are not ready to set up a home. If you were, you shouldn't take her to it as yet. Leave your FAMILY—" capitalizing the word in her father's finest style—"here until you select a nice little house in a part of the town where you have no acquaintances. Then, come, back, for, *your, wife, and, boy!*" putting a slow comma after each word—"and install them, with your mother, in respectability and comfort, for the rest of your prosperous life. No! don't speak until I have finished what I have to say! You may not have heard that the Van Dycks are leaving Kinapeg—root and branch?"

(Dick, dazed and gasping, yet recollected that he had said "bag and baggage," but it meant the same thing.)

"Going to Millville. Into the lumber business, which Father predicts will eat up their last dollar. More than that! I heard to-day, that Cort is engaged to be married to the daughter of the cousin who is inveigling them into the enterprise, and that the old folks are to live with him. You may imagine what that will mean to his sister! I will let you into another bit of secret family his-

tory. When John Van Dyck's father died, he left certain shares, mortgages and the like, to Sauchy. At her death they were to revert to her niece. Both of them were named for the old man's wife. He must have known that his son was not so clever as he thinks himself, for the legacy was put into the hands of trustees to be paid by them for the support of Sauchy, and, at her decease, to Sarah. Now,—Dick Walker!—” the commas in impressive play,—“those, trustees, are, Mr. Corlaer, and, MY FATHER! That was not generally known. Mr. Van Dyck is a little sore on the subject. He thought everything should have been left to his management. The money has been passed over to him at stated times. He may have spent it for his sister's clothes and board—or for something else! His daughter will receive it direct after this. When she has a husband to look into her affairs, it will be properly used. The investments are good, Father says. He would see to that. An honester man never lived. You ought to know all these things. And if you hadn't obeyed me to-day, you might never have heard them.

“You'll be saying that it is on the cards that she won't consent to marry you, now. Maybe she'll say 'No' for good and all. You've got to take chances in every business-deal. In my opinion, she is too sensible not to see that she will escape certain misery and get happiness by agreeing to your terms. Put it to her plainly. Unless—” a bright idea lighting up her face—“you would prefer to have Me undertake the commission?”

Dick laughed outright at that.

“You would do the job a great deal better than I can, I am sure, Mrs. Carson, and I am more grateful to you for all you have said and done for me than I can express. I will follow your advice implicitly.” He

glanced at the mantel clock. "If you will excuse me, I will hurry home and tell my mother what we have decided upon. I suppose—" hesitating and colouring—"I would better not speak to Mr. de Baun until—"

Rhoda struck in promptly:

"Certainly not! Only—don't admit to yourself the possibility of failure. 'Grasp your nettle!' And one thing more! This is not to be a secret marriage, so far as little Kinapeg is concerned. I shall make it my business to spread the news far and wide. I *wish* I were going to stay here long enough to see the dust it will raise! I won't keep you! You will have your hands full enough. May I ask as a favour that I may be one of the witnesses? I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

Sarah believed, in after days, that she could not have accepted the sacrifice of a young life so full of promise of fulfilled ideals, had she not been broken in spirit and dismayed to hopelessness by the survey of the future suddenly bared to her.

"I had known for months that I loved him," she confessed between sobs, to Mrs. de Baun. "Now, it seems that, if I had really cared for him, I must have been less selfish."

Dick told his story and made his plea in the vine-shaded doorway of the stone cottage. Patsey and Ben were watching the minnows under the bridge, so near by that the child's laugh mingled with the river's song.

The sun was dropping slowly behind the straight dark brow of the nearest mountain; the incense of clover-blossoms floated to them on a weak southerly wind; in the grove overhanging the water a thrush was chanting vespers.

"It must be all a dream!" sighed the girl as, at a signal from Dick to his mother his companion did not see, Pat-

sey strolled up the bank, Ben's hand in hers—"and it does not seem right somehow. I never expected to be happy again. Surely we ought to wait awhile? Dear Auntie—Dick?"

"Nobody would be gladder than she, dear, if she could know it. And"—his voice sinking into tender reverence—"I like to believe that she *does!* It would make her so happy that I can't think the angels would keep it from her!"

CHAPTER XXX

UP to the early eighties, Martin's of the Lower Saranac maintained a sturdy reputation for excellent plain cookery and the unconventional comfort coveted by sportsmen and jaded fugitives from the maddening crowd of cities.

Paul Smith's had a smack of aristocracy imparted by "course-dinners," imported beverages and high prices; Bartlett's creamed pickerel and broiled trout had international fame. The low-browed frame building with rude wharves sprawling across the head of the lake was, to proprietor, guides and habitués, the key of the wilderness of wood and water beyond.

The shriek of the locomotive had never pierced the depths of the forest primeval, and no steam-yacht ruffled the expanse of the lake-chain.

Tourists and sportsmen—the numbers increasing with the opening of each season—were transported from civilisation by big-bodied stage-coaches—usually blue or green—which disgorged their contents thrice a day under the open shed nobody thought of calling "*a porte cochère*," connecting two sections of the main building. These arrivals were the leading events of the day, and the occasions were rare when they did not give impetus to veranda gossip, and supply dramatic touches to meetings and recognition.

Somebody was always on the stage whom nobody there had expected to see, or for whom several somebodies had

been at the point of death with hope deferred for weary days.

“Coincidences are like sands of the sea for mutitude!” said a woman to a lately-arrived couple upon the lake-ward piazza one August afternoon. “I ought to be used to them by now, for we have been here ten days. When Dr. Lang and Margarita were dropped at my feet day before yesterday, it was one more of what scientific men would call an ‘indefinite series of coincidental happenings.’ But, to-day, when all the world was on hand to see the noon-stage come in, and I heard a man say at my elbow—‘Doesn’t that gentleman remind you of Gladstone?’ and a lady answer ‘It is a handsome edition!’ and I turned to see you and Mrs. de Baun, I cried out, like Peter Magnus—‘God bless my soul! there is no end to coincidences! I am the busiest of busy bees just now. I’ll tell you why presently. But sit down in this cosy corner, and don’t look at anybody but me for half-an-hour while I ask fifty questions, and unload my budget!’

“More coincidences?” smiled Mrs. de Baun.

A score of years had dealt tenderly with her matron comeliness. Her hair, stippled with grey, framed a face fresh in colouring and placid to serenity. As of yore, she regarded the speaker with indulgent amusement.

Mrs. Carson was already known as the “dashing widow” of the summer crowd. Her mitigated *douleur*, exemplified in grey silks, white tulle, and pearl and amethyst ornaments, had not abated original vivacity, or toned down the vigour of her speech. She was a striking figure in any company, and a desirable acquisition to a pleasure-making crowd with but one object in sight for weeks to come. With her thirst for excitement; her love of power, however transient the triumph, and her talent for spectacular

effects, she was in her element. Her eyes flashed; her fingers quivered and glanced.

She reminded Mrs. de Baun, as she said to her husband later, of the electrical figures used in demonstration in Natural Philosophy classes.

The Dominie was a D.D. now, and had a cure of souls in the largest city in New Jersey, but his heart turned longingly to the parish of his first love, and Rhoda was associated with the dear days that could come no more.

The stranger who had called him "a handsome edition of Gladstone" was not far wrong. The resemblance to the eminent statesman was marked as advancing years silvered his hair and drew stronger lines upon his features. He was a man of mark wherever he went, and beloved by his flock and fellow citizens.

"So Lang is here?" he said, in a satisfied tone. "I shall be glad to meet him again. I have not seen him in ten years, I think."

"The weight of years and honours has told upon him," responded Rhoda. "The honours have told mightily upon his wife. She never forgets, for the tenth of a second, that he is President of Unity College, which she informed me last night, 'will be a University some day under Norman's able management.' He has set on foot the Lord knows how many schemes of endowing it and raising the standard of scholarship and for making a great man of Norman Lang, A.B. and B.A. and LL.D. and Ph.D., and the rest of the alphabet. She didn't put it that way, of course. I never talked with another woman under the rank of Duchess who carried her honours with a higher hand—and head.

"When I mentioned that my sister and two of the dear aunts still live in the old home in Kinapeg, she raised her eyebrows and sighed that she 'can never re-visit the place.

It must be different with you? Your house can hardly be called a homestead. *Ours* dates back to the first Corlaer who emigrated to America.' This remark was made purposely audible to six people sitting near us. 'Since the death of my parents, and the passage of the place into stranger-hands, I dread the idea of seeing it again.'"

"The old Margarita!" observed Mrs. de Baun. "One of Carrie's boys was graduated from Rutgers at the last Commencement—a nice-looking fellow! Has Margarita children?"

"None! She laments that 'Norman' (she alternates that with 'Dr. Lang!') has no son to carry on the name. 'It is a mysterious dispensation,' she says, 'that gave Carrie three boys. George Adrain is well enough in his way, but nobody in particular.' But"—animatedly—"speaking of fine boys, I must show you my latest 'find' in that line! You could never guess who he is, if you strained your imaginations all day long. We met him at the Profile House last month, and made friends forthwith, when I told him who I was. He had often heard his father speak of me as one of his best friends. I visited them, six years ago, when Mr. Carson and I were in Buffalo. This youth was in Harvard then. He took a degree at Leipsic last year."

"You have not told us who he is, yet," Dr. de Baun reminded her.

"You cannot be talking of Ben Walker!" exclaimed his wife in the same breath.

"Of Ben Walker, my dear lady! and of a no less important personage. There are three other children—two boys and a girl—a third 'Sarah'—and any mother might be proud of them. But Ben is the finest of the tribe.

"You'll see him to-night! He went off with my son on a fishing-expedition three days ago, but they are sure

to be back before supper. I had word from them last night to that effect. Our entertainment would be minus a star of the first magnitude if our *tenore robusto* were to fail us."

"He inherits his mother's talent for music, then?"

"My dear Dominie, he sings like a lark—a thrush—a mocking-bird—all combined!"

"Don't leave out the nightingale!" admonished the diverted clergyman. "You stimulate our curiosity into impatience. May we attend the entertainment? What is it?"

Coming down to business, she set forth that a charade, clipped by herself from *Godey's Lady's Book*, would be acted under her management, her son "who has decided histrionic talent," taking the leading part. Half-a-dozen young people—guests in the hotel—selected by herself, would fill out the cast. A noted pianist, who chanced to be also in the house, had kindly consented to preside at the piano, to play several times, and to accompany the vocalists. There were but two of these—a concert-soprano of some note, from New York, and young Walker.

"You should have heard Mr. Bagley—the pianist—rave over Ben's voice and technique! He says he would make a fortune upon the operatic stage if he would take up music as a profession. To-night, he is to sing nothing more ambitious than two or three old ballads. He demurred when it was proposed that he might render some classic selections. He said—and he was right—that a promiscuous audience of holiday tourists is more likely to appreciate popular songs. Luckily, I have with me a bound volume of old ballads (illustrated) I picked up in the city the day before I left home. I brought it along, anticipating some such opportunity in which it might be useful. I have been often at summer-hotels where no

music was to be had. Professionals are only too glad to leave music portfolios behind them when they are off on vacations."

"Tell us something of Sarah and her home?" begged Mrs. de Baun, who was on the watch for a gap in the monologue. "We saw her in Buffalo—it must have been twelve years ago, Ed? She was very happy then, and in fine health. And Dick has prospered in everything he put his hand unto—apparently?"

"My father always said he would! I am so thankful he lived to see the fulfilment of the prophecy! Thankful, too, that he died before he lost his wonderful vigour of mind and body. It was really pitiful to see what a wreck Mr. Corlaer became at the last. The change began when poor Will died. He lost ambition, spirits and health. Father said that Corlaer always was a dreamer, but that some of his dreams might have proved true, if he had not lost all interest in them. And you know, there were heavy money-losses beside. If he had lived much longer his family would have inherited next-to-nothing. I never knew of a sadder break-down. You know *she* is living still?"

"Yes—and in a beautiful old age—honoured and beloved by all who know her," replied Mr. de Baun. "Her home is with Carrie. I should have thought she would be more comfortable in Margarita's house. There seemed to be more congeniality between her and her elder daughter in the old days. But Carrie has improved greatly since then. Adrain is a man of good sense and fine principles. His influence has been salutary. Maternity has done more—has done more!"

"Sarah is a marked illustration of the truth of that," said Rhoda, kindly. "Dick told me that both of them resolved, when the children were born, to study for them,

and make up so far as they could for the defect in their own early education. It was beautiful to see how both of them loved and honoured his mother as long as she lived. She was alive when I visited them in '76. The happiest and proudest grandmother that ever lived!"

"She wrote to us the last Christmas of her life, to acknowledge the trifling gift we never failed to send her at the holiday season," answered Mr. de Baun. "She told us then that her 'last days were the most blessed of all. I keep thinking all the time,' she said, 'of a text I heard you preach from, at the funeral of Dr. Ten Eyck's mother, who had been 'most blind for years—'At the evening-time it shall be light!'"

Rhoda's eyes glistened and her strident tones were mellow:

"Dear old Patsey! she and I had some fine times together in that old Guard House. You know it was pulled down last year? The march of improvement demanded the destruction. They have cut a road through the foundation. They pulled down Patsey's house at the same time. Shall we ever forget the wedding at which you officiated, and I was one of the witnesses? And how you appointed yourself a committee of one to interview the old folks before you would perform the ceremony, and got their consent, although their 'feelings would not allow them to attend any festivity so soon after there was a funeral in the family?'"

She stopped to laugh. Mr. de Baun was grave:

"Except Sarah, there is not a member of that family alive. Cort's fine lady-wife worried the life out of her mother-in-law within three years, and drove her husband to drink. The father died of a broken heart. I was sent for to bury Jack Van Dyck ten years ago. He fell from a railway bridge one dark night on his way home from

a saloon. It sounds like a mortuary report. You and ourselves have reason for devout gratitude that we have no hideous skeletons in our respective households. My boy and girl are the hope and joy of our declining years. Both are happily married. But I am afraid our interchange of reminiscence and gossip may be detaining you from official duties. It has been a great pleasure to meet you again. As we shall probably stay here a week, we hope for a renewal of the enjoyment."

The Norman Langs were absent all day on a trip to Mt. Elba, John Brown's former home and burying-place. Having ascertained this, the de Bauns sought a retreat known to them in former times—a grove of balsam firs a quarter-mile from the hotel, where they could rest and talk without danger of interruption from idle strollers. A plank set in the trunk of a tree at each end, offered a seat to the wife. Her husband preferred to lie upon the bed of fragrant needles, elastic as a mattress with the accumulation of years. It was a typical Adirondack day. The sun was still high in the lowlands, but almost touched the summits of the wooded slopes on the horizon. The golden shafts struck athwart the Dominié's face, and he shifted his position.

"Don't move!" exhorted his wife. "And put your arms back under your head. As you lay there with the sun in your eyes, I saw why that woman called you a 'flattered edition of the Grand Old Man.' Your square jaw and iron-grey hair heighten the resemblance."

They laughed like two care-free children; then silence as happy fell between them. The breeze crept through the evergreens above their heads—the sibilant lullaby unknown to deciduous growths, that is never quite hushed in the hemlock, pine and balsam, no matter how windless the day.

"The surf of the Adirondacks!" murmured the Domine, by and by. "None but those who are criminally busy for ten months out of twelve know the music for what it is. One needs a cultivated ear for the right appreciation of its meaning."

Another interval of eloquent stillness, stirred only by the "hush! hush!" of the boughs, and the wife said, dreamily: "Twenty years, love! Think of what has gone on, and who have passed out of our lives in that time! It is more than half the average term of human life."

"Computing that average to be thirty-three years? Yes, dearest! The babies of that day are men and women now. We are (as oftener happens now than of old, and we thought our minds ran in the same channel, then)—thinking of the same thing. Dick Walker has done well by the child—as well as if——"

He did not finish the sentence, as the wife perceived with a little petulance.

"Why do you stop? As I look at it, he has but done his duty."

"Somebody has defined heroism as 'doing more than one's duty.' In my estimation, Dick has not fallen short of the heroic."

"Ed! if you were anybody else, and I were not so comfortable in mind and body, I should call you unreasonable and pig-headed!"

He stretched out a hand to stroke her foot:

"Each of us has held to his and her own conviction for nearly a quarter-century without coming to blows. We won't break the truce at this late day. Upon one thing we agree:—With all her whimsies and mannerisms, Rhoda has some fine qualities. Take her by and large, I don't know but that I prefer her to the President's consort. When she reminds me a little too sharply of Timo-

thy O., I recollect that he was my good friend, and that he is dead."

"I can never forget that he broke down and cried outright when he came to say 'Good-bye' to us the day we left Kinapeg. Sometimes—I—am—almost—sorry we did not spend the rest of our days there. Those mountains over yonder bring it all back to me."

"We did what we believed to be right, dear child! If I had not thought, with all my soul, that the Master had use for me elsewhere, I would gladly have lingered until nightfall in the green pastures and beside the still waters."

When he spoke again, it was to praise the beauty of the day and the luxurious comfort of his present condition. His voice trailed off into a drowsy murmur, and in two minutes he was sound asleep.

Ah well! let him rest! it was not that he was bored by her society, but that he was fagged out by overwork. Stepping noiselessly, she broke a long spray from a young balsam tree and set herself to fanning the gnats and mosquitoes from his head and hands. She had her reveries and dream-pictures for company, and liked to have leisure in which she could conscientiously indulge them.

The sun had sunk clean out of sight, and in the dim recesses of the woods were amethystine shadows, premonitory of the long August twilight, when the sound of men's voices attracted her attention to the present scene. Two boats cut across the streaks of warm light cast by the afterglow upon the lake. They were manned by accomplished oarsmen, and raced swiftly, side by side, in the direction of the hotel, the music of hilarious young voices making a joyous hubbub in the sunset air.

They were not the tones of uncultured guides or holiday cockneys, the lady's practised ear discerned on the instant.

"Perhaps the Carson party," she conjectured. "One voice sounded vaguely familiar. Somehow, it set me to musing again on Kinapeg days. Or, it may have been Rhoda's talk that keeps my mind in that channel."

She had read Ossian in her girlhood, and a favourite quotation stole to her lips:

"The music of Caryl is like the memory of past joys,
Pleasant and mournful to the soul."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE smaller of the two drawing-rooms filling the lower floor of one wing of the summer caravansery was closed to the general public for all of that important day. Under the able supervision of the born leader of women (and some men), country carpenters had built a stage of planks supported by trestles raised four feet above the floor-level, and hung a green curtain from pole and rings, screening the platform from the prospective occupants of camp-chairs arranged in close rows in the spacious parlour and outer halls.

A door at the right of the stage gave upon an improvised green-room.

"I have engineered so many amateur theatricals that this affair is a mere bagatelle," the manager responded airily to the de Bauns' praise of her arrangements.

She had granted them a private view of the machinery and a rapid sketch of the programme, intercepting them on their way to supper.

"The curtain does not rise until half past eight o'clock to allow the supper to be eaten and cleared away comfortably. Have you met the Langs? No? They will be late in coming down, having returned from their pilgrimage very tired and dusty. I suspect that Mrs. President-of-Unity-College was more than half-disposed to decline my invitation to accept two of the best seats in the house, reserved by special order of the management for her distinguished lord and almost-as-distinguished

self. She pleaded fatigue, even after hearing that you were to have places next to them. I 'nailed' her by engaging the President to 'return thanks in the name of the Management and Actors at the conclusion of the performance, for the flattering and courteous attention awarded by the audience to our humble display of Home Talent'—and the rest of the stock-humbug. 'I had set my heart upon the final touch that would dignify the affair, as nothing else could.' I laid it on artistically, you may be sure, and brought down my bird. Excuse the mixed metaphor! I didn't use it in talking to *them*! My troupe take supper in a private room with me. Being in costume to save time, they cannot appear in the public dining-hall."

Thus it happened that the old neighbours did not meet until the de Bauns, who were in their places early ("to avoid the rush" as Rhoda had advised) stood up to shake hands with a white-moustached man in correct evening dress, whose air of distinction would have made him a marked figure in any assemblage, and a little lady with very lively black eyes. Her erect carriage made the most of her stature, and reminded Mrs. de Baun instantly of the gay widow's—"she carries it with a high hand—and head!" She looked as youthful as her forty-odd years allowed, in an embroidered India muslin and a high coiffure flanked by a lace butterfly pinned coquettishly upon the still-abundant and unfaded hair.

The reunited quartette shook hands cordially in the admiring sight of the audience crowding the parlours and hall to the doors, and sat down to exchange low-toned congratulations and queries. They were cut off in mid-swing by the tinkling of a bell behind the scenes and the obedient ascent of the green-baize curtain.

The stage was set as a family sitting-room for the

charade, and into the centre from the side-door advanced the high priestess of the occasion:

“Stately and tall, she moves in the hall,
The chief of a thousand for grace!”

quoted Mrs. de Baun to her husband in a swift “aside” through lips that formed no syllables, and he quaked with inward mirth.

The widow’s taste in dress was universally conceded to be faultless.

The sheen of her silvery-grey silk was tempered by draperies of black lace of cobwebby texture; her hair shimmered softly beneath a white lace “barbe,” a single pearl of price pinning the front into a Marie Stuart curve, and another catching it under the chin that betrayed a disposition to double itself over the folds. She had long, slim hands, and the tip of a long, slim slipper peeped beneath the front of the trained skirt. She enunciated distinctly, and her voice carried well. Her assertion of proficiency in engineering private theatricals was no empty boast. She chose her words judiciously and rendered them gracefully, in a half-dozen sentences that deprecated criticism of an amateur performance, and expressed the pleasure it had given the hastily-formed company to supply their fellow-guests with an evening’s entertainment.

It was a perverse, and, as she feared, a malicious trick of memory that tossed into Mrs. de Baun’s mind the vision of another evening’s entertainment and echoes of the speaker’s father’s peroration:

“I have gone into the highways and hedges and gathered thence my guests.”

“I wished for one agonised minute, that I had been

made up without a sense of humour!" she affirmed, penitently, in recounting the scene in a letter to her daughter on the morrow. "I did not glance at your father. Nothing could have saved us from open disgrace if I had."

"The first of the artists who will delight us this evening," Rhoda was saying—"requires no introduction to the music-lovers of the Middle States. The name of Alfred Bagley is as familiar to you as that of Beethoven or Rubinstein. It is my privilege and honour to introduce him to you."

After naming the music that was to regale their ears, she bowed to the pianist who had sat unseen by the audience behind the piano until she named him, and slid gracefully out of sight to the screen guarding the exit to the green-room.

That the pianist was encored was a foregone conclusion. Was there ever a summer-resort that withheld the provincial tribute to the exploitation of "native talent"?

After the gratification of the encore, "the little Charade selected from one of the foremost of our family magazines" was duly heralded. It went off well, with so little of the stamp of amateurism as to elicit sincere applause. With the pronunciation of the basic word, "Mill-It-Ary," the curtain sank without a hitch, and the first part of the show was ended.

The entr' acte gave the old acquaintances in the third row from the front some minutes for conversation. Their eyes and brains had been busy while the piano was under fire, and the charade was unfolding tortured syllables.

Mrs. de Baun had settled to her satisfaction that Margarita had not worn as well as might have been expected. Fretful creases at the corners, and a slight hollowing of the brilliant eyes, hinted at worry and conflict with circumstances, too mighty for the imperious will. She might

not have won in the twenty years' fight. She had not submitted. Carrie had quieted down in the even tenor of domestic life. Her sister was ever grasping at the as-yet Unattainable. To the one, life had brought massage. To the other it was friction.

"Friction! Fuss! Fidget!" ran the alliterative summary of the astute observer. "The father's consuming energy, without his dignity and poise. I wish she did not remind me at times of her mother! The general unlikeness is so painful! I never thought, in the old time, that foolish Carrie would develop into the finer woman. Why is it, I wonder, that some children fail to reproduce a single trait of either parent, while others are almost duplicates of ancestors, near and remote? Physiologists have much to learn yet in what would seem to be the 'a. b. c.' of their science. I should have said that the Corlaers would stamp their offspring in unmistakable characters."

Thus the running mental commentary upon what was before her bodily eyes, while she was answering Margarita's perfunctory queries with regard to the de Baun children and the parents' abiding-place.

"I do not trust myself to think of my old home and those who were the associates of my early days," Mrs. Lang said, pensively. "Times and life have changed sadly for our family! Of course, I would never have been content to spend all my life in poor cramped little Kina-pegi. The bare suggestion is suffocation! As for Norman, he has absolutely no fondness for the place. Sometimes, I think he hates the very name of it!"

The de Bauns fancied the answering smile was a trifle weary, and the studied moderation of the tone had, to a nice ear, a touch which, if it were not sardonic, was not free from a dash of acrid meaning.

“My dear wife! that could hardly be when it was there that I won and wedded you! Dr. de Baun will agree with me in saying that, as some ‘thoughts do lie too deep for tears,’ there are reminiscences we must bury clean out of sight, if we would keep sane and fit for the duties of the present. I could sentimentalise by the hour over Kinapeg and the ‘days that are no more,’ if I did not have a man’s work to do in the ‘living present.’ ”

“ ‘Heart within and God o’erhead!’ ”

The line slipped of its own weight from the Dominie’s lips. Both he and his wife were beginning to feel the unspeakable discomfort of listeners to a matrimonial skirmish which, they are morally certain, would be an open war of words but for their presence.

“ ‘Heart within and God o’erhead!’ ”—falling into his habit of repeating the last words when he meant them very much. “*That* is the watchword when one is in the thick of the fight! I comprehend just what you mean, my dear fellow. There are times when I am too deadly in earnest over the work of the day to trust myself to look backward. It would unman me. Yet my wife and I had a sweet half-hour of Kinapeg reminiscing this afternoon in my old hiding-place—the balsam grove over yonder. It is one of our vacation-luxuries. Mrs. Carson opened the sluice-gates in a chat we had with her.”

Mrs. Lang sniffed contemptuously. It is not an elegant word, and the reality was utterly unbecoming the consort of the President of a college that was going to be a University, but the fact remains.

“She makes me *tired!*” she ejaculated, falling into slang as inelegant as the sniff. “You need not frown at me, Norman! You are as much out of tune with her as

I am. Her redundant energy is oppressive. She is never content unless she occupies the seat of honour and is filling it to overflowing. Which she generally manages to do. It is a bore to be here to-night at all, but she wanted us to see her triumph. So she roped in Dr. Lang to return thanks after meat. *She* said grace, as you heard! If I do not fall asleep before the ridiculous farce is over, it will be surprising."

Dr. Lang was unmistakably annoyed. Patience of the finest quality will fray under continual scratching. The Dominie again threw himself before the harried husband:

"She promised what will be an attraction to us, at least,"—he began, when a round of applause hailed the rising of the curtain upon the second act of the programme. Mrs. Carson was already upon the stage, and at her left stood by the piano a young woman with a roll of music in her hand. It was the managers' pleasure "to present Miss Emilia Thorsley, whose international reputation has earned for her a passport to every heart.

"The company and the management have concerted what they are convinced will prove a welcome innovation upon conventional musical entertainments. Nothing will be sung this evening but selections from ballads beloved by our mothers and grandmothers. They are endeared to us by tenderest associations. They never grow old, because they sprang from the heart and go straight to the heart, making the world-battered cynic a child again at his mother's knee, and reviving the love-story of the most cynical misanthrope of us all.

"Miss Thorsley will prove the truth of what I am saying—and far more than I could ever express. I leave the beautiful task to her."

"Bravo!" shouted a cosmopolitan sexagenarian, and

a storm of clapping hands assured the speaker that she and her innovation had made the hit of the evening.

Miss Thorsley sang first—"Ye banks and braes of Bonnie Doon," and the encore was the most pathetic of English ballads,—"Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!"

The Mistress of Ceremonies interposed, when a second call would have insisted upon a third song.

Rhoda's lace-edged handkerchief was in ostentatious evidence while she quieted the clamour:

"When you hear why I interfere, you will pardon me. For one thing, Miss Thorsley's vocal organs may not be so stout as her heart and her willingness to oblige you.

"In the second place, I have yet another treat in store for you. As a long-time resident of the Empire State, I thrill with pride in presenting to you one of your own citizens who has lived in your thriving city of Buffalo, from infancy. As a native of the gallant little State of New Jersey—your 'little Sister' as you sometimes call her—"

Deafening applause obliged her to pause for a minute:

"Having been born and brought up—as all my fathers were—in 'the Jerseys'—I am justly proud to present to you a native of my own Commonwealth, who has cultivated his rare talents in the best Conservatory of Music upon the European Continent.

"Ladies and gentlemen! I present to you with honest and affectionate—and prideful—pleasure. Mr. Ben Walker of New Jersey, New York and Germany!"

More and stentorian "Bravos" from travelled-men, and hand-clapping that jarred the sashes of the open windows, bore tribute to the oratorical powers of the Mistress of Ceremonies and saluted her protégé.

The de Bauns clutched one another's hands convul-

sively. The wife felt the woman sitting beside her start violently, and then shiver as in a hard ague.

In the centre of the brilliantly-lighted stage, bowing and smiling mute acknowledgment of the ovation, stood Norman Lang, as they had seen him twenty-four years before. His evening dress set off rarely the well-knit figure and handsome face. In every lineament and gesture, he was the living image of the man the three spectators had known long and intimately.

One hand—the whilome teacher's from wrist to finger-tips—held a loose sheet of manuscript music. (They learned, subsequently, that Rhoda had had it copied by one of her troupe expressly for him from her bound volume of ballads.) Mrs. de Baun's fingers tightened until the nails cut into her husband's flesh, when the young man raised the other hand to put back a truant lock from his forehead. She had seen the mannerism many times in singing-classes and in parlours. She recalled, with poignant distinctness, how Norman brushed his hair back in rising to sing in the white moonlight on the night of the Ladies' Aid supper at the Van Dycks'.

The piano broke into a brilliant prelude at that instant, and her senses reeled.

For this was the song upborne by the accompaniment following the prelude:

“I have heard the mavis singing
His love-song to the morn;
I have seen the dew-drop clinging
To the rose that's newly-born.
But a sweeter voice hath charmed me
At the evening's gentle close,
And I've seen an eye still brighter
Than the dew-drop on the rose.

"Twas thy voice, my gentle Mary,
And thine artless, winning smile
That made the world an Eden,
My Mary of Argyle!"

"Though thy voice may lose its sweetness,
And thine eye its brightness too,
Though thy step may lack its fleetness
And thy hair its sunny hue.
Still to me thou wilt be dearer
Than all the world shall own,
I have loved thee for thy beauty,
But not for that alone,
I have watched thy heart, dear Mary,
And its goodness was the wile
That made thee mine forever,
Bonny Mary of Argyle!"

In tone, in strength, in cadence—most of all, in the nameless, mysterious quality we term, for lack of a better descriptive epithet, "sympathetic,"—the voice was so exactly that of Norman Lang at the same age as to be uncanny. The one had studied in America, the other in Germany. The school might have been one and the same. Even the perfect articulation of every syllable, without producing the effect of studied precision, which had been one of the charms of Lang's vocalisation, was marked in the youth who bore another man's name.

Atavism had never a more triumphant demonstration.

To the de Bauns the revelation was monstrous and weird to the verge of the supernatural. It was a supreme moment in their united lives. After one hortified exchange of glances, neither sought counsel or sympathy

from the other. The shameful story unrolled itself slowly to each.

As the last thrilling note of the song lost itself in the hushed air, a storm of applause broke the charm laid upon the audience—and Margarita Lang looked at her husband!

She was white with contending passions; her eyes compelled his to read in them intensity of scorn before which his soul shrank and cowered. He pulled himself together with a mighty effort:

“I am afraid the heat is too much for you? Would you like to go out into the air?”

His tongue was as dry as the lips that fashioned the query, but she comprehended it. There was fascination in the dilated eyes that would not let his go.

“*If you can stay, I can!*”

Each deliberate monosyllable was a drop of corrosive acid. It was the seamed face of an old man from which the basilisk gaze passed again to the stage.

Rhoda Carson was at the singer’s side, deprecating, in eloquent pantomime, the increasing energy of the “encore.”

“When you hear what is in store for you, you will be glad to let me tell you of it,” she said, when at last she could be heard. “The next song upon our unwritten programme is a duet between Miss Thorsley and Mr. Walker. It is one dear to us all. I recollect, as if it were yesterday,—and with an odd lump in my throat”—putting her hand to it, illustratively—“crying over it when I was young and my heart was tender. I still think it beautiful. We will now hear, ‘What Are the Wild Waves Saying?’”

It was a tumultuous surge of reminiscence that swept the whilome mistress of the Kinapeg manse out of hear-

ing of the music. One thought rolled back upon her persistently: Had Norman Lang ever seen his child until to-night, except in the brief glimpse of the mother, clasping the baby to her breast in cowering into the covert of the hedge, out of sight of the gay party of riders? Every particular of the scene, as Margarita had described it, recurred to horrified memory. Sarah Walker had never revisited Kinapeg since her removal to Buffalo. The child was a stranger to her kindred and old neighbours.

Was the apparition that had bereft the de Bauns of reason for one dizzy minute, also a revelation to the man who had cloaked his sin so successfully for over a score of prosperous years? Of course, he had no prevision of Rhoda's *coup d'état*. And she—? Under her plotting and contrivance of spectacular effect—did there lurk the design of revenging, to some extent, the dead youth whose fair fame had been clouded, for all those years, by the calumny a word from the craven brother-in-law could have dispelled?

The dreamer was awakened by seeing her husband draw an envelope from his pocket, and tear a blank page from the letter it contained. Still dazed, she read across his arm what he scribbled hastily, while the duett went on.

“Let me say what you wish to be said, when this is over! To insist upon your original design would be a refinement of cruelty.”

Folding the scrap of paper, he addressed it to Mrs. Carson, and signalled to an usher to take it behind the scenes.

There was a fine fighting-strain in the Corlaers, and it is not beyond the range of possibilities that the outraged wife may have bethought herself of gloating upon the refinement of retribution fate and Rhoda Carson would bring to pass in the public introduction of the

father to the unsuspecting son. She may have reasoned, furthermore, that, were her husband to shirk the duty at this late hour, the schemer and intriguer to whom she owed the crucial humiliation of her life, would be assured that the barbarous plot was successful in all its parts. She would fight it out, if it cost her life and reason! She meant this when she dared Norman to stay where he was.

The short night was wearing toward the small hours, the complacent manager reminded the still importunate audience at the close of the duett:

“For my own part, I admit that I would gladly go over the entire programme again, here and now. But we must not be forgetful of the cardinal maxim: ‘The greatest good to the greatest number,’ and there are varying degrees of physical strength. It was my plan to have Dr. Norman Lang, the eminent President of Unity College, say a few words on behalf of the management and the troupe to you in bidding you, ‘Good night.’ Wait—don’t applaud me yet! He would have obliged me in this, had not another bright idea occurred to me. Among our late arrivals is a noted divine whose coming I must regard as a special providence. For the Rev. Dr. Edward de Baun baptised Mr. Walker, and has been, through a period of many years, the friend of his parents, although the two have not met since Mr. Walker’s return from Germany. It is, therefore, eminently expedient that Dr. de Baun should be our spokesman.”

She may not have been tired. It was apparent that she was less happily at her ease than in her earlier addresses. A grateful audience accepted the substitute with good grace, and applauded the neat speech of acknowledgment the more heartily because of its brevity.

The de Bauns worked their way out of the throng by

the nearest exit, after the formality of the briefest possible "Good nights" with their nearest neighbours. Loiterers in the aisles and halls fell back respectfully to clear a way for the elderly man with a white moustache and a slight droop of the shoulders, whose companion—presumably his wife—had evidently found the entertainment too much for her. She gasped as she walked, and the sombre eyes, too big for the small face, were larger and blacker for her deathly pallor.

Stragglers in the office saw him come in, an hour afterward, and enter his name and his wife's as passengers for the early morning stage.

"You won't get much sleep to-night, sir?" remarked the clerk, conversationally, in making the entry.

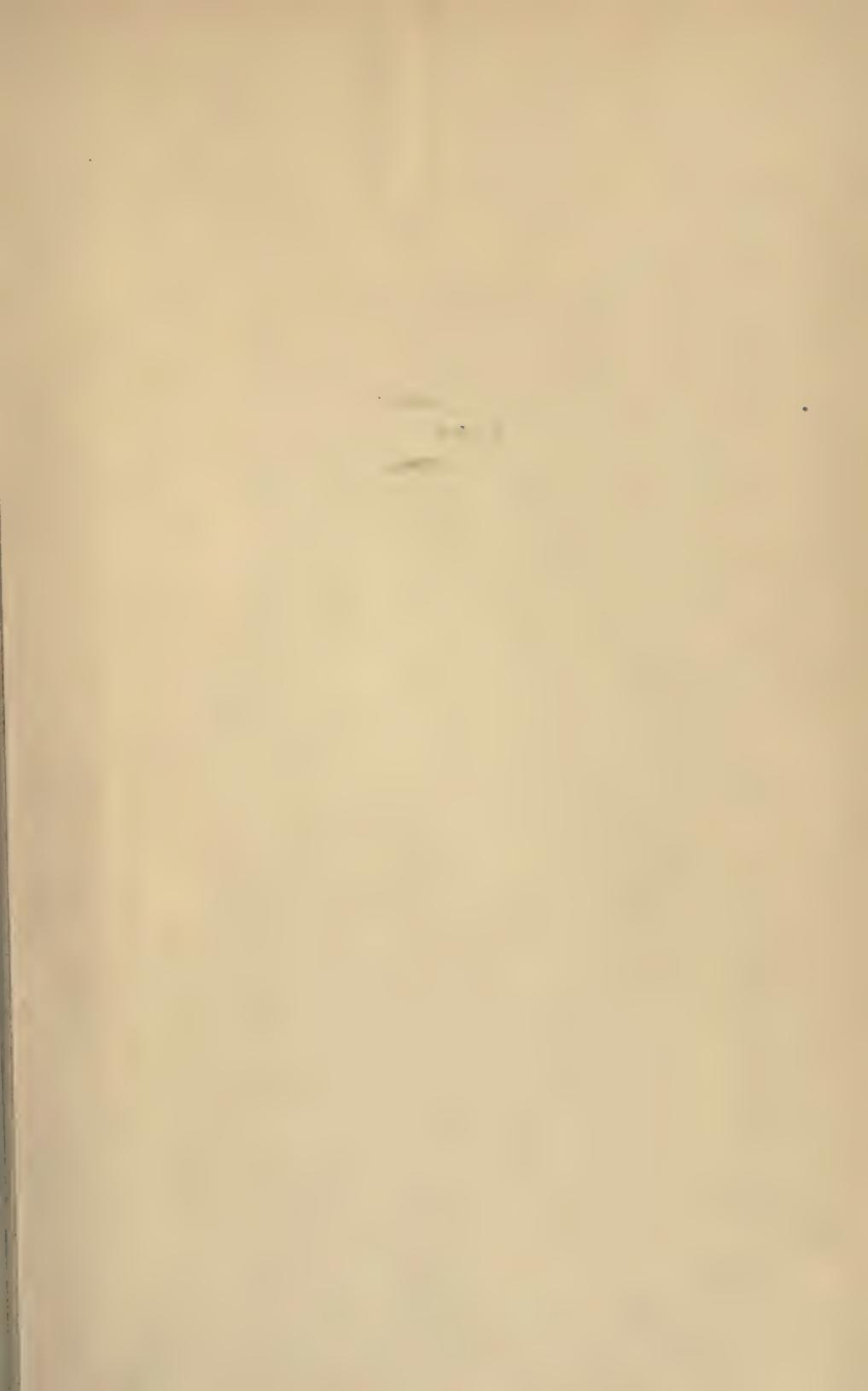
"Please see that the trunks are sent for in time," was the only reply.

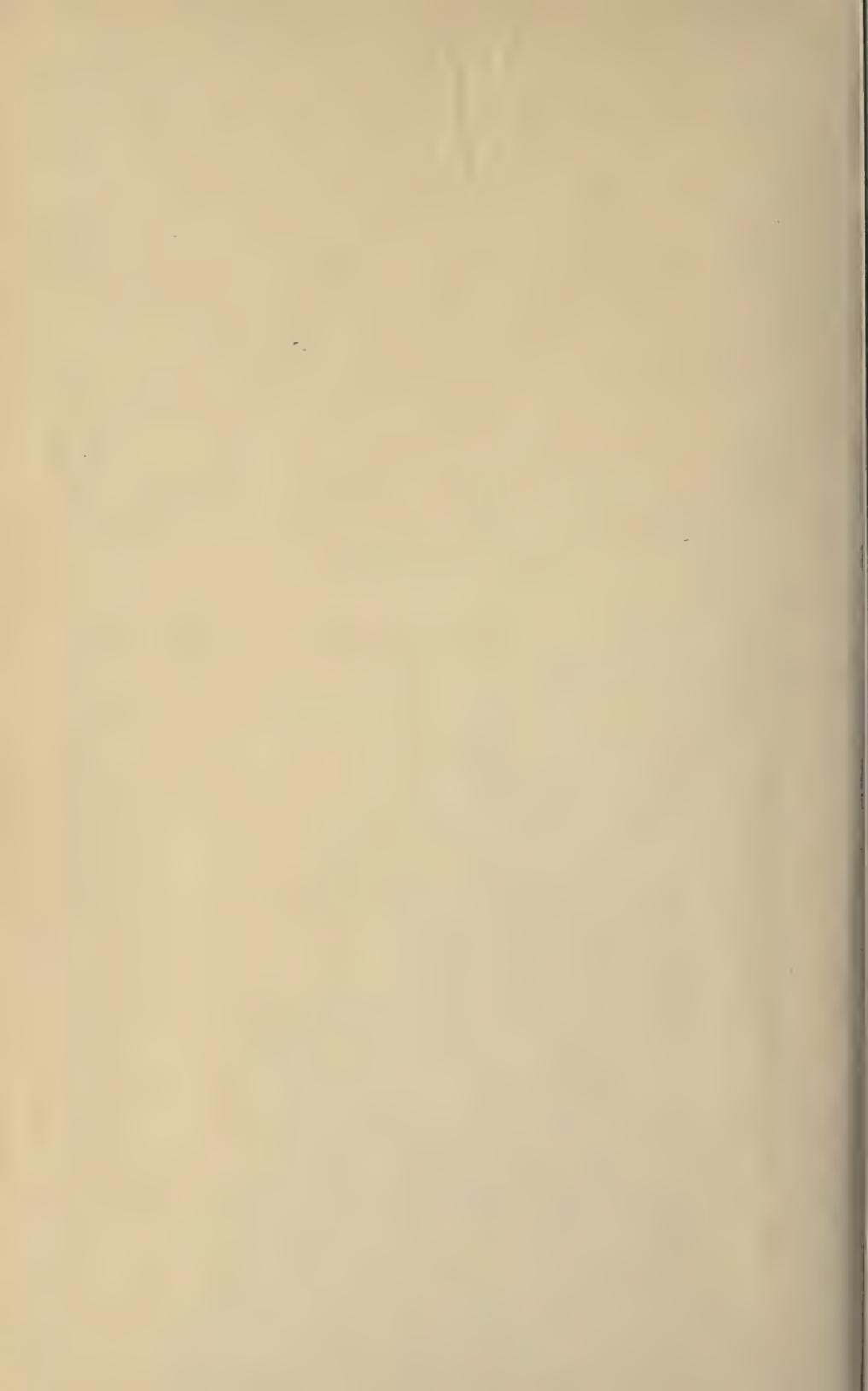
A guide took note of the haggard face and uncertain gait, and when the object was out of earshot, offered his comment in Adirondack patois:

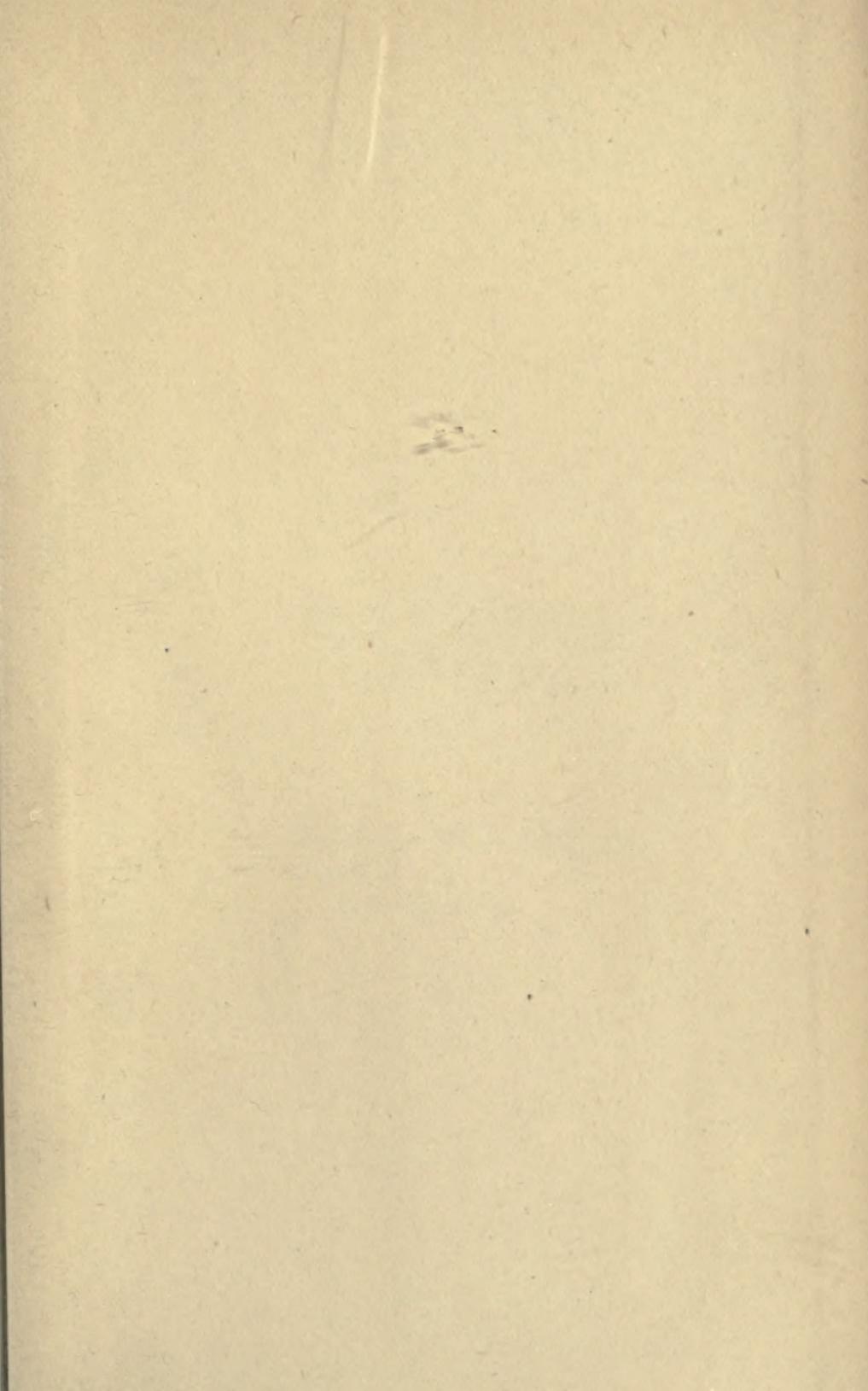
"Look's 'f he'd had a bout with somebody or somethin', and come out second-best!"

At that moment Edward de Baun was ending a long and exquisitely painful conference with his sole confidante:

"The mills of the gods may grind slowly,' my love, 'but they grind exceedingly small! exceedingly small!'"







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CAR

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Hours.

Mon. to Thurs. 9 am to 9 pm

Fri. & Sat. 9 am to 5 pm

Sunday 1 pm to 5 pm

PS
3007
L6
1915

Terhune, Mary Virginia
(Hawes)
A long lane

